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Knowles.- The Wife 4th ed. 1833



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THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
CLASS OF 1882
OF NEW YORK

1918

THE WIFE:

A Tale of Mantua.

A PLAY, IN FIVE ACTS.

BY

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES,

AUTHOR OF "VIRGINIUS," "THE HUNCHBACK," &c.

FOURTH EDITION.

LONDON:

EDWARD MOXON, DOVER STREET.

1833.

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FROM
THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WEND
1618

LONDON:
PRINTED BY BRADBURY AND EVANS,
WHITEFRIARS.

TO
CAPTAIN THOMAS BLAIR,

(OF THE HON. COMPANY'S SHIP, WILLIAM FAIRLIE).

MY DEAR CAPTAIN BLAIR,

You would be angry with me were I to tell
the world my reasons for dedicating this Play to you.

I keep them, therefore, to myself:—leaving them to be imagined
by those who love to depict friendship in its most munificent and
disinterested aspect, and simply subscribe myself,

Your attached and faithful servant,

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.



THIS play makes its appearance under circumstances which are far from auspicious:—yet I confidently present it to the public, knowing that it will receive every indulgence at their hands.

What may be its effect in the representation, I know not,—but I am bound to acknowledge the zeal displayed on the part of the company, and, above all, the indefatigable exertions of Mr. Farley, in preparing it for the stage. My principal reliance is upon the part of Mariana; and implicit is the confidence with which I have entrusted this character to the lady, whose personation of Julia has imparted to the Hunchback an interest, which, after the play had been worn out at the Haymarket and the Surrey, has sustained it through twenty nights of the present Season.

To my early, my trusty, and honoured friend, Charles Lamb, I owe my thanks for a delightful Epilogue, composed almost as soon as it was requested. To an equally dear friend I am equally indebted for my Prologue.

My play has been greatly benefited by the suggestions of Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Bartley; but my crowning obligation is to my friend Mr. Forster, for his kindness and critical judgment.

April 24, 1833.

PROLOGUE.

SPOKEN BY MR. WARDE.

UNTOWARD fate no luckless wight invades
More sorely than the Man who drives *two trades* ;
Like Esop's bat, between two natures placed,
Scowl'd at by *mice*, among the *birds* disgraced.
Our author thus, of two-fold fame exactor,
Is doubly scouted,—both as Bard, and Actor !
Wanting in haste a Prologue, he applied
To three poetic friends ; was thrice denied.
Each glared on him with supercilious glance,
As on a Poor Relation met by chance ;
And one was heard, with more repulsive air,
To mutter “ Vagabond,” “ Rogue,” “ Strolling Player ! ”
A poet once, he found—and look'd aghast—
By turning actor, he had lost his *caste*.
The verse patch'd up at length—with like ill fortune
His friends behind the scenes he did importune
To speak his lines. He found them all fight shy,
Nodding their heads in cool civility.
“ Their service in the Drama was enough,
The poet might recite the poet's stuff ! ”

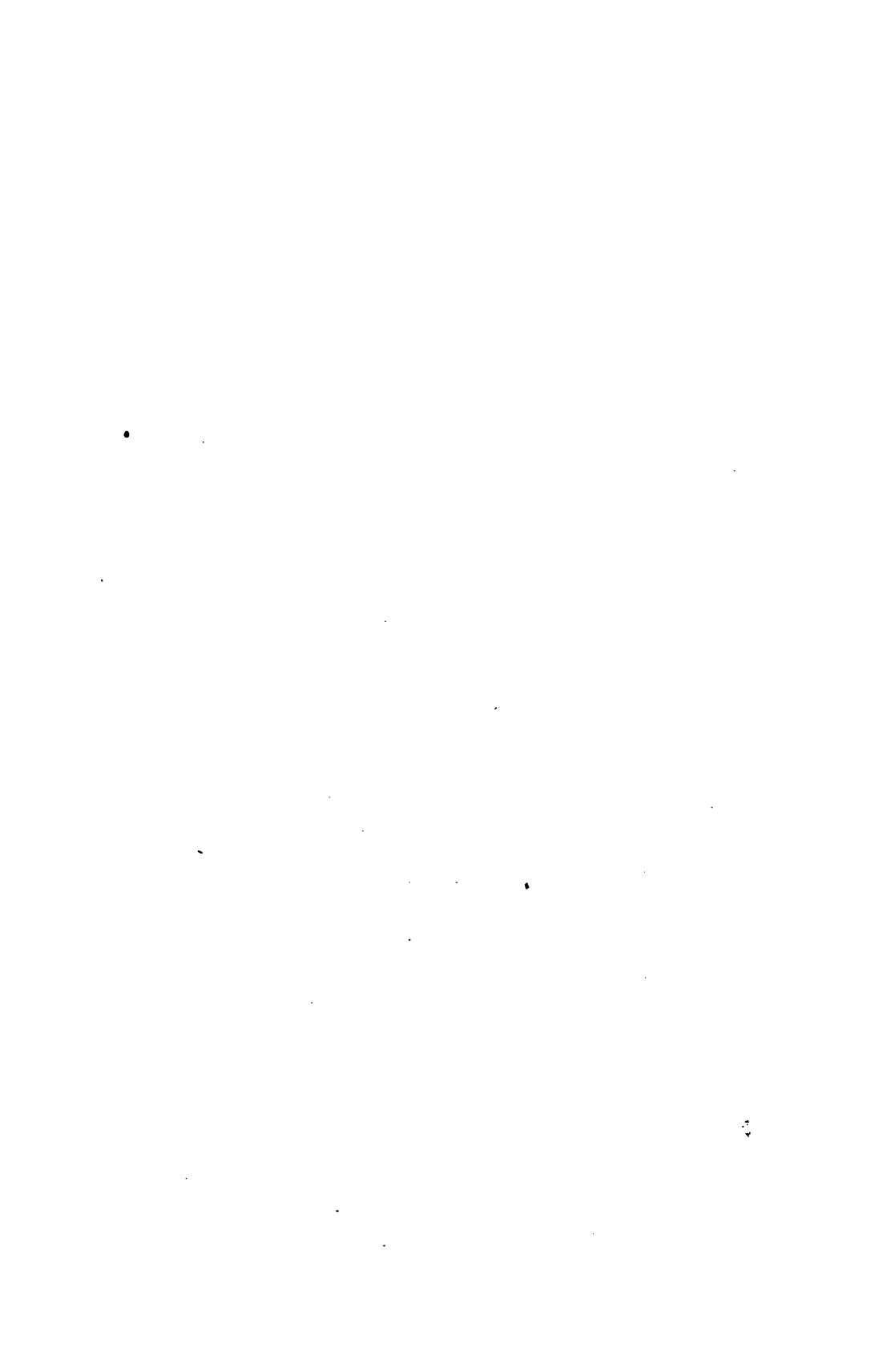
PROLOGUE.

The rogues—they like him hugely—but it stung 'em,
Somehow—to think a Bard had got among 'em.
Their mind made up—no earthly pleading shook it,
In pure compassion 'till I undertook it.
Disown'd by Poets, and by Actors too,
Dear Patrons of both arts, he turns to you !
If in your hearts some tender feelings dwell
From sweet Virginia, or heroic Tell :
If in the scenes which follow you can trace
What once has pleased you—an unbidden grace—
A touch of nature's work—an awkward start
Or ebullition of an Irish heart—
Cry, clap, commend it ! If you like them not,
Your former favours cannot be forgot.
Condemn them—damn them—hiss them, if you will—
Their author is your grateful servant still !

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MARIANA	<i>Miss Ellen Tree.</i>
FLORIBEL	<i>Miss Sydney.</i>
LEONARDO GONZAGA	}	<i>Princes of Mantua.</i>	}	<i>Mr. C. Kean.</i>	
FERRARDO GONZAGA				<i>Mr. Warde.</i>	
COUNT FLORIO	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Diddear.</i>	
JULIAN ST. PIERRE	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Sheridan Knowles.</i>	
ANTONIO—A CURATE	.	.	.	<i>Mr. G. Bennett.</i>	
LORENZO—AN ADVOCATE OF ROME	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Abbott.</i>	
HUGO—GUARDIAN TO MARIANA	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Ransford.</i>	
BARTOLO	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Meadows.</i>	
BERNARDO	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Turnour.</i>	
CARLO	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Barnes.</i>	
MARCO	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Henry.</i>	
PIETRO	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Payne.</i>	
STEPHANO	.	.	.	<i>Mr. J. Cooper.</i>	
FIRST LORD	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Irwin.</i>	
ADVOCATE OF MANTUA	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Haines.</i>	
FIRST OFFICER	.	.	.	<i>Mr. T. Matthews.</i>	
SECOND OFFICER	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Mears.</i>	
COURIER	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Heath.</i>	

SCENE—*Mantua*;—*afterwards the Camp.*



THE WIFE :

A Tale of Mantua.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—A STREET IN MANTUA.

Enter LEONARDO GONZAGA *and* LORENZO.

LEONARDO.

So, in my native city, thanks to heaven,
Ten years and more elapsed, I stand again !
A boy it sent me forth, takes back a man.
Hail to it ! 'Tis mine old acquaintance still,
In nothing strange—unaltered ! To a stone
The same I left it ! Glad am I to see it—
None better loves its venerable face !

LORENZO.

I'm glad to see you smile.

LEONARDO.

I do so, Signor.

I am a boy again ! The days come back
 When smallest things made wealth of happiness
 And ever were at hand ! when I did watch
 With panting heart the striking of the clock,
 Which hardly sounded ere the book was shut.
 Then for the race—the leap—the game—O Signor,
 The vigour and endurance of such joy !
 Is't e'er to come again ? And care so light,
 That, looking back, you smile you thought it care,
 And call it part of pleasure ! I'm again
 In Mantua !

LORENZO.

Then here we say farewell.

LEONARDO,

Not so ; acquaintance, born and nurtured in
 Adversity, is worth the cherishing :
 'Tis proved steel which one may trust one's life to.
 You are a stranger here in Mantua,
 Which I am native to. What brings you hither ?
 If 'tis a cause no scruple of just weight
 Forbids thee to unfold, unbosom thee,
 And in return for what thou part'st with, take
 The zeal and honour of a hearty friend,
 And service too, to boot ;—you pause, from doubt
 Either of my ability or faith.
 If this, I'm sorry for't—If that, take heed.
 You know not by the eye the practis'd limb
 Where the inform'd and active sinew lies,
 That's equal to the feat. What, silent still !

'Sdeath, man! a dwarf is not to be despis'd,
 For he may have a giant for his friend,
 And so be master of a giant's strength.
 Come, come, have confidence;—'tis the free rein
 Which takes the willing courser o'er the leap
 He'd miss if you did check him!

LORENZO.

There are men
 Whose habits in abeyance hold their natures
 Which still remain themselves. Your temperament
 Is of the sanguine kind,—and so is mine,
 But lo, the difference! Thy frankness brooks
 No pause—thy wish is scarce conceived ere told—
 As if men's hearts were open as their looks,
 And trust were due to all. The law hath been
 My study, Signor; and, these three years past,
 My practice too; and it hath taught me this:—
 To doubt, with openness to be convinced,
 Is to remain on this side danger, yet
 No fraction lack of generosity
 Which it becomes a noble mind to cherish.

LEONARDO.

And doubt you me?

LORENZO.

No, Signor; but drew back,
 When you with instant promptness did advance
 Where I, with all the heart to take the step,
 Had still, I fear, been standing. You shall know
 My errand hither. I am nephew—

LEONARDO.

Stop
Till these pass on !

Enter BARTOLO, CARLO, BERNARDO, and others.

CARLO.

Will not the Duke postpone the cause ?

BARTOLO.

I tell thee no.

CARLO.

And wherefore ?

BARTOLO.

What's that to thee ?—Is not he the Duke ? Shall such a piece of flesh and bone as thou art, question the Duke ?

CARLO.

Why not ?

BARTOLO.

Why not ! Would any one believe he had been born in Mantua ? Now mark how I will answer him ! Dost thou drink Burgundy ?

CARLO.

No, but water.

BARTOLO.

Then art thou, compared to the great Duke, what water is to Burgundy.

CARLO.

He is but flesh and blood.

BARTOLO.

But what kind of flesh and blood ? Answer me that !

Would'st thou, that dinest upon garlic and coarse bread, and washest them down with water, compare thyself to one who sits down every day of the week to a table of three courses? Thou art no more than a head of garlic to the Duke!

BERNARDO.

Say on, Bartolo! Well! 'The Duke refuses to postpone the cause; and what then?

BARTOLO.

Why then the cause must come on.

BERNARDO.

And what will be the end on't?

BARTOLO.

That knows the Duke.

CARLO.

But what ought it to be?

BARTOLO.

What the great Duke wills.

CARLO.

Why so?

BARTOLO.

Because that must be.

BERNARDO.

She was a bold girl, when they forced her to the church, to refuse to give her hand there, and claim the protection of the curate.

BARTOLO.

He was a bolder man to have anything to say to so mettlesome a piece of stuff.

CARLO.

And to refuse a Count!

BARTOLO.

Her cause will not thrive the better for that, unless, indeed, the Duke be wroth with the Count, for honourably affecting a commissary's ward.

LEONARDO (*aside*).

You seem intent on their discourse.

LORENZO (*aside*).

I am so.

BERNARDO.

You saw her, Bartolo, did you not?

BARTOLO.

Yes, I was passing by when they were forcing her into the church, and followed them in.

CARLO.

Is she as handsome as they say?

BARTOLO.

Humph!—handsome!—handsome is this, and handsome is that. I could sooner tell the absence of beauty than the presence of it. Now thou art not beautiful, but dress thee like a duke, and it might change thee. Thou that art an ugly craftsman, might become a beautiful duke. Notwithstanding I think I dare pronounce her handsome—very handsome! nay, I will go further, and confess that, were she a countess, or a duchess, I would call her the most beautiful woman in Mantua.

BERNARDO.

But why wishes the curate to have the cause postponed?

BARTOLO.

To wait for a learned doctor of the law, for whom he has sent to Rome, but who has not yet arrived, though hourly looked for.

CARLO.

What! must one send for law to Rome?

BARTOLO.

Yes, if one cannot find it in Mantua,

CARLO.

Cannot one find law in Mantua?

BARTOLO.

Not if it be all bought up. There's not a legal man of note whom the count has not retained; so was the curate forced to send for his nephew to Rome—a man, it is reported, of great learning, and of profound skill in his profession, though hardly yet out of his nonage.

LEONARDO (*aside*).

You colour, Signor! 'tis of you he speaks.

CARLO.

Fears he to come to Mantua, or what?

BARTOLO.

'Tis thought the brigands have detained him—a plague upon the rascals! A word in your ears, Signors. You all know that Bartolo is a loyal man.

ALL.

We do, Bartolo.

BARTOLO.

Said I ever a word against the Duke?

ALL.

No!

BARTOLO.

You are right, Signors: nor would I, though the Duke were to hang every honest man in Mantua, for is he not the Duke?—and is not Bartolo a loyal man? Now if I speak of the Duke's cousin, whom the brigands, they say, have killed, speak I against the Duke?

ALL.

No!

BARTOLO.

Is't treason to say "a pity that he was killed"?

ALL.

No!

BARTOLO.

Ah, Signors, had he succeeded his father, he would have made a proper Duke. Is this saying anything against his cousin that is the Duke?

ALL.

No.

BARTOLO.

I warrant me, no! Catch Bartolo talking treason! Who says a word against the Duke? He dies, as Bartolo is a loyal man. But fare you well, Signors. The trial comes on at noon—and noon will soon be here.

BERNARDO.

We go your way.

BARTOLO.

Come on, then. Remember I said not a word against the Duke.

[*Exeunt* BARTOLO and others.]

LEONARDO.

Of you he spoke—was it not so?

LORENZO.

It was.

LEONARDO.

You come to Mantua to plead the cause
Of this fair damsel. You were here before,
But that the brigands intercepted you,—
Your hurt, but my advantage, whose escape,
Long time their captive, you contriv'd. And now,
To prove my friendship more than wordy vaunting:—
I have the power to serve you. Take me with you.
Your clerk, you said, opposing vain resistance
The hot-brained robber slew. Suppose me him :
I have a smattering of his vocation,
A notion of the mystery of yours ;
And I would hear, by their own lips recited,
This worthy priest and beauteous damsel's cause,
For reasons which—you smile.

LORENZO.

A thought did cross me.

LEONARDO.

I know thy thought—'tis wrong!—'Tis not the heat
Of youthful blood which prompts—you smile again.

LORENZO.

Your pardon.—If I did, you have to thank
The quickness of your apprehension.

LEONARDO.

Mark me !—

I have loved my last—and that love was my first !
A passion like a seedling that did spring,

Whose germ the winds had set; of stem so fine,
 And leaf so small, to inexperienced sight
 It passed for nought,—until, with swelling trunk,
 And spreading branches, bowing all around,
 It stood a goodly tree! Are you content?
 This was my sadness, Signor, which the sight
 Of my dear native city banished;
 Which thy misgiving hath brought back again;
 And which will be the clothing of my heart,
 While my heart calls this breast of mine its house.

LORENZO.

I pray you, pardon me!

LEONARDO.

I pray you, peace!
 Time presses.—Once again, have confidence,
 And take me with you to your uncle's home.
 More than you credit me, I may bestead you.
 Wilt take my hand?

LORENZO.

I will!

LEONARDO.

Have with you, then!

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—ANTONIO'S HOUSE.

Enter ANTONIO and PIETRO.

ANTONIO.

What lacks it now of noon?

PIETRO.

An hour or more.

ANTONIO.

No chance of his arrival !—This delay
Perplexes me ! Is it neglect?—I thought
His answer would have been his presence here,
Prompt as my summons ; yet he neither comes
Nor sends excuse. 'Tis very strange ! She holds
The same sedate and lofty carriage still ?

PIETRO.

She does, and native seems it to the maid
As her fair brow, wherefrom it calmly looks,
As from its custom'd and assured seat :
A gentleness that smiles without a smile :
For 'tis the sweetness, not of any part,
But all—look, speech, and act,—delights the heart
That's near her. Silence is her humour ; yet
She never shuns discourse ; while what she says
Hath one unwearied constant burden still,
A blessing on your reverence.

ANTONIO.

Poor girl !

She owes me nought. Why do I serve my master
If not to do his bidding ? Is it but
To hold the crook ? Nay, but to use the crook !
To be indeed the shepherd of the flock—
Wakeful and watchful—pitiful and faithful—
My charitable life, and not my name,
The badge and warrant of my sacred calling !
She was afflicted, persecuted, and

I succour'd her !—I, standing at the altar !
 Beneath my master's roof ! His livery,
 Blazon'd, as ne'er was earthly king's, upon me !
 What could I less ?

PIETRO.

Fails he to come, for whom
 Your reverence looks, to plead the damsel's cause,
 Must it perforce go on ?

ANTONIO.

It must ; and I
 Myself will be her advocate, before
 The haughty Duke. For problems of deep law,
 Will give him axioms of plain truth, and paint
 Her thrilling grievance to the life with tears,—
 Which, Pity seeing, shall to every heart
 That owns her gentle influence, commend,
 And gather tears to aid them.

Enter STEPHANO.

STEPHANO.

May it please you,
 Two strangers, craving audience, wait below.

ANTONIO.

Admit them ! 'Tis my nephew ! Worthy Pietro,
 Have all in readiness that we appear
 Before the Duke when cited. [*Exit* PIETRO.

Enter LEONARDO GONZAGA and LORENZO.

So, Lorenzo !

LORENZO.

Save you, my reverend uncle !

ANTONIO.

Now a week

I've looked for you—but waive we explanations.

Thou'rt come :—and to the business that has brought thee.—

I have possessed thee of the damsel's cause

In all its bearings—art prepared to plead it ?

LORENZO.

I am, so please your rev'rence ;—but, with us

That evidence is best which is direct.

That the Count Florio seeks the damsel's hand,—

That wills her guardian she should give it him,—

That she resists her uncle and the count,—

I know, but not the cause of her dissent.

Children to guardians do obedience owe ;

A match so lofty warrants some enforcement,

Which, not on slight grounds, should the maid resist.

ANTONIO.

Ground know I none, save strong aversion.

LORENZO.

Pray you

Vouchsafe us conference with the maid herself.

Her deposition shall this gentleman

That's come with me—my trusty clerk—set down.

ANTONIO.

I'll bring her to you ;—but, I charge you, boy,

You keep in mind you are her advocate.

For she, indeed, of those rare things of earth,

Which of the debt that's due to it, rob Heaven,

That men set earth before it, is the rarest !
 Then guard thee, nephew !—rather with thine ears
 And tongue discourse with her, than with thine eyes,
 Lest thou forget it was her cause, not she,
 That summon'd thee to Mantua !

LORENZO.

Fear me not !

[*Exit* ANTONIO.]

LEONARDO.

A service of some danger, it should seem,
 Your rev'rend uncle has engaged you in ;
 And, by his pardon, for your safety, takes
 Means which your peril rather do enhance.
 The soldier that is taught to fear his foe,
 Is half o'ercome before he takes the field.

LORENZO.

Is't from your own misgivings you doubt me ?

LEONARDO.

No:—as I said before, my heart is safe—
 Love-proof, with love ! which, if it be not, Signor,
 A passion that can only once be felt—
 Hath but one object—lives and dies with us—
 And, while it lives, remains itself, while all
 Attachments else keep changing—it is nothing !
 I used to laugh at love and deem it fancy ;
 My heart would choose its mistress by mine eyes,
 Whom scarce they found ere my heart sought a new one.
 I knew not then the 'haviour of the soul—
 How that's the loveliness which it doth lodge,
 A world beyond the loveliness of form !
 I found it ! when or where—for weal or woe—

It matters not ! I found it ! wedded it !
Never to be divorc'd from that true love
Which taught me what love was !

LORENZO.

You wedded it ?—
Then was your passion blest ?

LEONARDO.

No, Signor, no !
Question no further, prithee ! Here's your uncle !

Enter ANTONIO and MARIANA.

ANTONIO.

Lo, nephew ! here's the maid
To answer for herself !

LORENZO (*to LEONARDO*).

She's fair, indeed !
Description ne'er could give her out the thing,
One only glance avows her !—Prithee, look !

LEONARDO.

Show her to him who has not seen the fairest !
Remember, Signor, Time's no gazer, but
Doth ever keep his eye upon his road,
His feet in motion ;—noon is just at hand.

LORENZO.

I thank you. Note my questions—her replies.
Your guardian—is he your relation too ?

MARIANA.

No,— would he were ! That stay had needs be strong,
Which failing, we've no other left to cling to.

LEONARDO.

Oh, music !—

LORENZO.

What's the matter ?

LEONARDO.

I did hear

A bird, whose throat did beggar all the grove,
And of its rich and famed minstrel makes
A poor and common chorister !

LORENZO.

Hear *her* !—

You'll have no ear for any other bird ;
Look at her, and you'll have no ear for her,
Your tranced vision every other sense
Absorbing !—Gave you promise to the Count ?

MARIANA.

None !

LORENZO.

Nor encouragement ?

MARIANA.

Such as aversion

Gives to the thing it loathes.

LORENZO.

Have you a vow

Or promise to another ?—that were a plea
To justify rejection. You are silent.
And yet you speak—if blushes speak, as men
Declare they do. Come, come, I know you love.
Give me to know the story of your love !

That, thereupon, I found my proper plea
To shew your opposition not a thing
Of fantasy, caprice, or forwardness,
But that for which all hearers shall commend you,
Proves it the joint result of heart and reason,
Each other's act approving.—Was't in Mantua
You met ?

MARIANA.

No, Signor ; in my native land.

LORENZO.

And that is—

MARIANA.

Switzerland.

LORENZO.

His country too ?

MARIANA.

No, Signor, he belonged to Mantua.

LORENZO.

That's right—you are collected and direct
In your replies. I dare be sworn your passion
Was such a thing, as by its neighbourhood
Made piety and virtue twice as rich
As e'er they were before. How grew it? Come,
Thou know'st thy heart—look calmly into it,
And see how innocent a thing it is
Which thou dost fear to shew.—I wait your answer.
How grew your passion ?

MARIANA.

As my stature grew,

Which rose without my noting it, until
 They said I was a woman. I kept watch
 Beside what seem'd his death-bed. From beneath
 An avalanche my father rescued him,
 The sole survivor of a company
 Who wandered through our mountains. A long time
 His life was doubtful, Signor, and he called
 For help, whence help alone could come, which I,
 Morning and night, invok'd along with him.—
 So first our souls did mingle !

LORENZO.

I perceive :—you mingled souls until you mingled hearts ?
 You lov'd at last.—Was't not the sequel, maid ?

MARIANA.

I lov'd, indeed ! If I but nurs'd a flower
 Which to the ground the rain and wind had beaten,
 That flow'r of all our garden was my pride :—
 What then was he to me, for whom I thought
 To make a shroud, when, tending on him still
 With hope, that, baffled still, did still keep up,
 I saw at last the ruddy dawn of health
 Begin to mantle o'er his pallid form,
 And glow—and glow—till forth at last it burst
 Into confirmed, broad, and glorious day !

LORENZO.

You loved, and he did love ?

MARIANA.

To say he did,
 Were to affirm what oft his eyes avouch'd,

What many an action testified—and yet—
What wanted confirmation of his tongue.
But if he loved—it brought him not content !
'Twas now abstraction—now a start—anon
A pacing to and fro—anon, a stillness,
As naught remain'd of life, save life itself,
And feeling, thought, and motion, were extinct !
Then all again was action ! Disinclin'd
To converse, save he held it with himself ;
Which oft he did, in moody vein discoursing,
And ever and anon invoking Honour,
As some high contest there were pending, 'twixt
Himself and him, wherein her aid he needed.

LORENZO.

This spoke impediment : or he was bound
By promise to another ; or had friends
Whom it behoved him to consult, and doubted ;
Or 'twixt you lay disparity too wide
For love itself to leap.

MARIANA.

I saw a struggle,
But knew not what it was.—I wondered still,
That what to me was all content, to him
Was all disturbance ; but my turn did come.
At length he talked of leaving us ; at length,
He fixed the parting day—but kept it not—
O how my heart did bound !—Then first I knew
It had been sinking. Deeper still it sank

When next he fixed to go; and sank it then
To bound no more! He went.

LORENZO.

To follow him,
You came to Mantua?

MARIANA.

What could I do?—

Cot, garden, vineyard, rivulet, and wood,
Lake, sky, and mountain, went along with him,—
Could I remain behind? My father found
My heart was not at home; he loved his child,
And asked me, one day, whither we should go?
I said, “to Mantua.” I follow’d him
To Mantua! to breathe the air he breath’d,
To walk upon the ground he walk’d upon,
To look upon the things he look’d upon,
To look, perchance, on him!—perchance to hear him,
To touch him! never to be known to him,
Till he was told, I lived and died his love.

LORENZO.

I pray you, Signor, how do you get on?
I see you play the woman well as I,
And, sooth to say, the eye did never weep,
In which her story could not find a tear!
How get you on? indite you word for word
As she delivers it? How’s this! The page
As blank as first you found it!—all our pains
Have gone to lose our time.

LEONARDO.

I have a gift
Of memory, Signor, which belongs to few.
What once I hear, stands as a written page
Before me; which, if asked, I can repeat
True to the very letter.—You shall have
A proof of this. I have a friend or two
I fain would snatch a word with—that despatched
I'll meet you at the Duke's, and bring with me
The damsel's story, word for word set down,
And win your full content; or give you leave
To brand me an impostor, or aught else
A man should blush to pass for. Will you trust me?

LORENZO.

I will.

LEONARDO.

You may, for you shall ne'er repent you.
I'll bring you aid you little count upon. (*Aside.*) [Exit.

ANTONIO.

Nay, nephew, urge your friend to stay. A space
You have for brief refreshment: and, in sooth,
You want it, who, from travel just alighted,
Must needs to business go.

LORENZO.

Detain not him;
Some needful avocations call upon him.
I wait your pleasure.

ANTONIO.

Daughter, come.

Some effort has it cost to tell your story,
 But profit comes of it;—your cause is strong.
 Your vows, which virtually are another's,
 Heaven doth itself forbid you give the Count !
 Is't not so, nephew ?

LORENZO.

There I'll found the plea,
 Which to the conscience of the Duke I'll put.
 Knows he—whom, at his death (which I'm advised
 Took place in Mantua) your father nam'd
 Your guardian—knows the commissary this,
 Which thou hast now related ?

MARIANA.

Not that I know of.
 My father's death was sudden.—Long time since
 He and the commissary were acquaintance ;
 What pass'd between them, save the testament
 Which left me ward unto the commissary,
 I am a stranger to.

LORENZO.

Since you came hither
 Have you seen him, for sake of whom you came ?

MARIANA.

No !

LORENZO.

Nor hast clue direct, or indirect,
 To find him out ?

MARIANA.

No, Signor.

LORENZO.

And how long
Have you sojourned in Mantua?

MARIANA.

Two years.

LORENZO.

And is your love the same?

MARIANA.

Am I the same?

LORENZO.

Such constancy should win a blessing.

ANTONIO.

Yes!

And strange as 'tis, what seems to us affliction

Is oft a hand that helps us to our wish.

So may it fall with thee—if heaven approves! [*Exeunt.*]

END OF FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—HALL OF JUSTICE IN THE DUKE'S
PALACE.

—

On one side BARTOLO, BERNARDO, CARLO *and others* ;
on the other Lords and Ladies, &c. &c.

BARTOLO.

Silence, Signors ! Keep order ! The parties in the
cause are coming—here they are !

Enter MARIANA *leaning on* ANTONIO, *attended by*
LORENZO ; *after them the Count* FLORIO, *and*
various Doctors of the Law.

BARTOLO.

That is the maiden, and that the curate upon whom
she leans.

BERNARDO.

And where's the Count ?

BARTOLO.

Yonder, surrounded by the Doctors of the Law.

BERNARDO.

The maid is very fair.

BARTOLO.

Yes, for a burgher's daughter. Hush! The Duke approaches. The cause will straight come on.

*Enter the DUKE FERRARDO GONZAGA, and attendants.
The whole assembly rise.*

FERRARDO.

Your seats !. your seats ! *(The assembly sit.)*
Bring on this cause ! Who answers for our friend,
The Count ?

ADVOCATE.

My Lord, so please you, I.

FERRARDO.

Proceed.

ADVOCATE.

The question lies between the Count, and this,
The guardian of the maid—whose froward act
Your Highness is possess'd of—on the one side :
The maid herself, and that, the reverend man,
Who countenance doth lend unto that act,
Upon the other. Hereon founds the Count
His right unto the maiden's hand.—The will
And promise of her guardian, unto whom
Behoves her choice to bow—for choice herself
The maid, of right, hath none.—This were the case,
Propos'd her guardian to affiancè her
To one in rank as far beneath the maid
As is the maid beneath the Count. But lo,
The difference ! By this alliance does

She gain a consort of a rank so high
 And wealth so broad, he were pretender fit
 To hand of any maid in Italy !—
 Such is our cause. In the first place, the right
 To give away the maid ; and in the next
 That right exerted for her highest good.

BARTOLO.

He is a good spokesman—the Duke deliberates.

LORENZO.

My friend is lost, almost soon as found.
 He has deceived me. No ! he comes at last,
 And keeps indeed his promise, if he brings
 Such friends as these to back us !

*Enter LEONARDO GONZAGA as clerk to LORENZO; followed
 by several persons of distinction.*

BARTOLO.

Observe you, Signors ! Are not those who just now
 entered, relatives and friends of him that were the Duke,
 had not mishap stepped in 'twixt him and his father's seat ?

BERNARDO.

They are.

BARTOLO.

Do they abet the maid ? You see they take their station
 round her:—they are not wont of late to frequent the
 palace.

BERNARDO.

Peace ! the Duke is going to speak.

FERRARDO.

Count, on what plea claim you the maiden's hand?

FLORIO.

Her guardian hath affianced her to me.

FERRARDO.

Speak you, her guardian,—states the Count the fact?

HUGO.

He does, so please your Highness!

FERRARDO.

What's her age?

HUGO.

She lacks a year of her majority.

FERRARDO.

Her rank?

HUGO.

Her father was a burgher.

FERRARDO.

Wealth

Has she been left?

HUGO.

What charily enjoy'd,

From manual labour might, perhaps, exempt her.

FERRARDO.

And stoops the Count so low to be despis'd—

Rejected—spurn'd! Let the maid be given

Back to her guardian's custody; and if

Obedience be refus'd, let him enforce it!

The cause is judg'd.

LORENZO.

Your Highness' pardon, but
The other side's to hear.

FERRARDO.

Who's he that speaks?

LORENZO.

The counsel for the maid.

FERRARDO.

Let him be wise,
And not gainsay our pleasure.—It is told!
The cause is over—finally adjudg'd.

LORENZO.

How far your Highness' power extends I know!
Yet though it reach unto my life, that life
I hold to be my good, and husband not
A minute longer than it ministers
Unto mine honour's profitable use.
The duty which I should discharge in vain,—
Not through its own demerit, but defect
In him whose will availeth more than right,—
I leave undone:—but 'gainst the power protest
Which makes me—servant unto justice—slave
Unto oppression. For the pangs that ring
That maiden's heart, be answerable thou,
Not I!

ANTONIO.

Your Highness—

FERRARDO.

Peace! I will not hear thee, father!

ANTONIO.

Then Heaven will hear me! I do call on it
For judgment on the man who wrongs this maid!
And sure as I do call 'twill answer me,—
And speak to thee—be thou that wicked man—
When power thou hast no longer to cry “Peace!”

FERRARDO.

That wicked man!

ANTONIO.

O, poverty of earth—
That men do deeds which win them evil names,
And spurn the names, but not the deeds which win them!
What truth instructeth me shall I not speak?
Suffer'd the maid from any violence
Should he not die? What callest thou the deed
Which would condemn her to a loathed bed?
Think'st thou there's virtue in constrained vows,
Half utter'd—soulless—falter'd forth in fear,
To purge the nauseousness of such a deed,
That heaven won't smell the damning odour on't?
And if there is, then truth and grace are nought!
Then sanctity is nought! yea, Heaven itself!
And in its empyrèal essence lies
No savour of its sweetness!

FERRARDO.

Peace, I say!

ANTONIO.

Thou can'st not bid the thunder hold its peace—

Why criest thou peace to me?—Nay, bid me speak—
 That thou may'st bear to hear the thunder speak—
 The herald, earth-accredited of Heaven,—
 Which when men hear, they think upon Heaven's king,
 And run the items o'er of the account
 To which he's sure to call them.

FERRARDO.

Dread my power !

ANTONIO.

Dread thou the Power, from which thou hold'st thy power !
 Proud man, I brave thee where thou sit'st, and in
 The ear of earth and heaven denounce the sentence
 Which gives that injur'd maid to violence !

FERRARDO.

I'll hear no more !—The cause is judged—the maid
 Her rightful guardian take !

MARIANA. (*Advancing to centre.*)

And if he does

He takes a corse ! Lo ! death is at my lips ;

(*Taking a small phial from her bosom.*)

The hand or foot that offers to approach,
 Commits a murder ! In this phial bides
 The bane of fifty lives ! pass but a drop,
 Were now the sexton told to dig my grave,
 Were now his foot upon the shovel set,
 'Ere he began, I should be ready for it !
 Who stirs ? Lo, here I sink upon my knee !
 Or let the Count his hateful suit forego,

Or let my guardian his consent revoke,
Or let the Duke recal his foul decree,
Or hence, by mine own limbs, I never rise !

FERRARDO.

Why to the Count this strong repugnance, girl ?

MARIANA.

Give thou thy oath that none shall stir, I'll speak.

FERRARDO.

I give it thee.

MARIANA.

I am a maid betrothed !
All but the rites, a wife ! A wedded heart
Although unwedded hand ! Reflect on that !
Making me give my hand unto the Count,
You make me give what is another's right :—
Constraining me to an unrighteous act,
Contenting him where it is base to wish,
And doing violence to Heaven itself,
Which curses lips, that move 'gainst consciences !

FERRARDO.

Lives he of whom you speak in Mantua ?

MARIANA.

In Mantua, he told me he did live.

FERRARDO.

What ! know you not the place of his sojourn ?

MARIANA.

Yes ! where he still sojourns, where'er he is !

FERRARDO.

What place is that ?

MARIANA.

My heart ! Tho' travels he
By land or sea—though I'm in Mantua,
And he as distant as the pole away—
I look but into that and there he is,
It's king enthron'd, with every thought, wish, will,
In waiting at his feet !

FERRARDO.

This is the mood,
The phantasy of girlhood ! Do we hold
Our power of suff'rance of a baby-maid,
Who mocks us with a threat she durst not keep ?
Secure her !

MARIANA.

Lo, the phial's at my lips !
Let him who would do a murder, do it !
Had he a thousand hands to wait upon thee,
The slightest movement of this little one,
Would make them useless all !

LEONARDO.

My Mariana !

FERRARDO.

She has dropt the phial.

LEONARDO. (*Coming forward.*)

Stir not on your lives !

My Mariana !

MARIANA.

'Tis he !

LEONARDO.

It is, my love !

'Tis he who won thy heart, not seeking it !
'Tis he whose heart thou won'st, not knowing it !
Who saw thee rich in all but fortune's gifts,
And—servant unto men, tho' lord of them—
Balanc'd their poor esteem against thy wealth,
Which fortune could not match ! Accountable
To others, never I reveal'd the love,
I did not see the way for thee to bless,
As only thou would'st bless it ! Now that way
Is clear ! is open ! lies before my sight,
Without impediment, or anything
Which, with the will, I cannot overleap !
And now, my love before ! my love till now !
And still my love !—now, now, I call thee wife
And wed thee here—here—here—in Mantua !

FERRARDO.

Remove that slave who knows not where he is !

LEONARDO.

Descend, great Duke, who know'st not where thou sit'st !

FERRARDO.

Where do I sit ?

LEONARDO.

Why in thy cousin's seat !

FERRARDO.

He's dead !

LEONARDO.

He's not ! He lives, and claims his seat,
Back'd by his kinsmen, friends, and every one

That owns a loyal heart in Mantua !

(Throws off his gown.)

Do you not know me, cousin ?

FERRARDO.

Leonardo !

LEONARDO.

Six years have we been strangers, but I see
You know my father's face, if not your cousin's.

FERRARDO.

I do, and yield to you that father's seat.

LEONARDO.

Cousin, the promptness of your abdication
Invests it with a grace to which we bow.
We'll spare your sight the pain of our accession,
And pray that with the parties in this cause—
(I mean the Count and guardian of the maid)
You now withdraw, and at your former mansion,
Wait intimation of our further pleasure.
I would not have you speak, so please you, now.
When we confer, it must be privily.
Yet, out of honour to our common blood,
Well as in pledge of no unkind intent,
Your hand before you go ! *(They shake hands.)*

FERRARDO.

Nay, let me speak

At least my thanks, your Highness, and my welcome—
Before I take my leave.

[Exeunt FERRARDO, FLORIO and HUGO.]

ANTONIO.

Rise, Signors, rise !
Live Leonardo, Duke of Mantua !

LEONARDO.

We thank you, friends ! This welcome is of the heart.
For you we take this seat. Thou reverend man,
Be confessor unto the Duke of Mantua :
Thou man of law and honour, be his friend,
And advocate of state : and both of you
Lead hither that abstracted maid ! But no !
That office should be mine (*descends*). In Italy
Shines there a brow on which my coronet
Could find so proud a seat ? My Mariana,
Wilt be my bride ? Nay, do not tax thy tongue
With that, thy looks have scarce the power to speak !
Come !—share my seat with me ! Come, Mariana !
The consort of the Duke of Mantua !
(She faints in his arms as the scene closes.)

SCENE II.—A ROOM IN THE PALACE.

Enter COSMO and COURIER.

COSMO.

The Duke ? which Duke ? I know not which ; we have
had two within the last ten minutes ; I know not which
Duke it is thou wantest.

COURIER.

I tell thee, the Duke of Mantua.

COSMO.

Is thy business public or private?

COURIER.

Dost thou not see I come from Rome? There are great matters on foot, which it behoves the Duke to know; and herein, if I mistake not, he is appriz'd of them.

COSMO.

Nay, then, thy business is public, and of course concerns the reigning Duke.

COURIER.

Of course it does.

COSMO.

I'll bring thee to him.

COURIER.

Lead on!

Enter BARTOLO, BERNARDO, and MARCO, meeting them.

BARTOLO.

Signor Cosmo!

COSMO.

Don't stop me, Signor Bartolo. I am in haste.

BARTOLO.

Nay, a word—only a word. Who is that?

COSMO.

A courier from Rome.

BARTOLO.

I was right, Bernardo. Save you, Signor. You come, I hear, from Rome. How are they all at Rome?

COURIER.

Well, Signor—~~a~~ that I am acquainted with.

BARTOLO.

They have a great deal of news in Rome?

COURIER.

Sufficient, Signor.

BARTOLO.

One likes to hear the news.

COURIER.

I trouble myself little about it.

BARTOLO.

That is because 'tis your vocation to hear it. Nobody is in love with his vocation. Now 'tis the reverse with me. I mind the news as much as I mind my meals. Pray you, Signor, have mercy upon a hungry man, and tell me the news from Rome.

COURIER.

Great news, Signor,—there is going to be a war.

BARTOLO.

A war! A war, Bernardo—Cosmo :—and pray you, Signor, with what power are they going to war?

COURIER.

With the French.

BARTOLO.

The devil!

COURIER.

You will have a fine opportunity for showing your valour, Signor.

BARTOLO.

I thank you, Signor. I was never an ostentatious man :

I am content to be a man of valour—I don't care to show it; but I thank you for the news. Come along, Bernardo—Carlo. A war, Signors, a war! What a glorious thing is a war! There's news!

SCENE III.—THE VESTIBULE BEFORE THE
DUCAL PALACE.

Enter ST. PIERRE.

ST. PIERRE.

Here be my seat upon the palace steps,
Altho' they hang me from the portico!—
Have a heart, Poverty, thou hast nought to lose,—
Nor land, nor mansion, nor habiliments,
That thou shouldst play the craven! That thou call'st
Thy life—what is it? Hunger!—Nakedness!
A lodging 'neath the eaves! ten scornful looks,
For one of pity; and that one a proof
That thou'rt an anguish to the aching sight!
Then what car'st thou for cuffs? Nay, cuff again,
That they may fall the heavier!—satisfied
That he, who brains thee, does thee, Poverty,
A thousand times the good, he does thee ill!—
Come—keep the portal of the mighty Duke
Who made thee what thou art; nor let him pass
'Till from his fear thou wring'st an alms, or else
A quick release obtainest from his wrath!

FERRARDO. (*Without.*)

Be sure thou keep'st the hour.

ST. PIERRE.

Talk of the fiend,
They say, and here he comes! here comes the Duke.

FERRARDO. (*Entering.*)

Hoa! clear the vestibule!

ST. PIERRE.

Great Duke, ascend!
No retinue doth stop your gracious way!
Here is no throng,—for Poverty sits here,
Craving a foot of your fair palace steps,
For lack of better resting-place.

FERRARDO.

Who are you?
What do you here?

ST. PIERRE.

Wait, mighty Duke, an alms!
I could not ask the humble craftsman one,
I used to cuff him;—nor the tradesman one,
I used to make him doff his cap to me;—
Nor yet the merchant one, he gave me way,
Or I gave him my shoulder;—nor the courtier,
My hilt I handled soon as he touched his;—
In brief, I passed by all degrees of men,
To beg an alms of the most gracious Duke!

FERRARDO.

Here!

ST. PIERRE.

What! a florin? give it to the street,
For the abased eye of vagrantry.
I make no livelihood of raggedness!

FERRARDO.

Scorn'st thou my gift ?

ST. PIERRE.

Thy gift and thee, great Duke !
Nay, frown not ! choler doth disturb digestion,
And that would mar thy afternoon's repast ;
Leave wrath to me, who have not tasted food
Since Wednesday last,—nor look for meal to-day.

FERRARDO.

Why that would buy thee five !

ST. PIERRE.

What were five meals—
To starve anew ! I should not light on thee
A second time to beg another alms !
Thou wouldst take care to shun me ! better starve
Outright,—for, saving thee, most gracious Duke,
There's not a man in Mantua I'd stoop
To ask a ducat of.

FERRARDO.

Well, there's a ducat.

ST. PIERRE.

It will not do.

FERRARDO.

What hoa there !

ST. PIERRE.

Softly, Duke !
Hush ! better far that we confer alone,
For thy sake ! mark !—for thy sake, gracious Duke !

FERRARDO.

What means the villain ?

ST. PIERRE.

Right, Duke, that's my name !
What do I mean? I'll tell thee what I mean.
My wardrobe wants replenishing; if puffs
The wind, my hat is like to lose its crown;
My robe is all the covering I have;
My shoes are minus nearly half the soles;
And then I fain would change my lodgings, Duke,
Which, sooth to say, is e'en the open street—
Less spacious would content me; last of all
I would be master of a larder, Duke,
Would serve me, at the shortest, good a month,
That I might live so long at ease, and see
If aught turned up would make it worth my while
To shake a hand with the fair world again,
And live on terms with it.—Most gracious Duke,
Give me a hundred ducats !

FERRARDO.

Dost thou think
To rob me at the palace gates !

ST. PIERRE.

Who robs
Provides him weapons. I have none, great Duke,
Nor pistol, rapier, poniard,—not a knife:
I parted with them one by one for food.
For weeks have they been provender to me !
Think upon that, great Duke, that at a meal
Spend'st twenty times their product, and, so please you,
Give me a hundred ducats.

FERRARDO.

Thou art mad !

ST. PIERRE.

No, by St. Jago ! try me ! I have the use
Of my wits. I'll neither leap into a flood,
Nor run into a fire ! I do know
The day of the week, the month of the year, the year ;
I'll tell you which are fast days, which are not ;
But that's no wonder,—I have kept so many.
To balance this, I'll tell you feast days too !
I'll write and cipher for you ;—finally,
I'll give you all the fractions and their sums,
Lie in a hundred ducats !

Servants enter from the Palace.

FERRARDO.

Seize him !

ST. PIERRE.

Stop
Till you have learn'd my name ! Imports you much
To know ! 'tis affix'd, most gracious Duke,
To certain documents which only wait
Your leave to see the light.

FERRARDO.

What documents ?

ST. PIERRE.

Shall these o'erhear or private be our speech ?

FERRARDO. . (*To Servants.*)

You may withdraw a pace or two.

ST. PIERRE.

You see,
Great Duke, I am not mad.

FERRARDO.

What documents?

ST. PIERRE.

One memorandum for a hundred crowns,
For whipping one that did offend your grace :—
I paid me with the pleasure of the task,
Nor asked the hire, but kept the document.
Another, for enticing to a haunt
Of interdicted play, a wealthy heir :—
I scorned the hire for that,—tho', shame to say it,
I did not scorn to earn it—but I kept
The document.—A third—

FERRARDO.

Enough—St. Pierre !

ST. PIERRE.

Aha ! you know me now ?

FERRARDO.

How chang'd thou art,—
I ne'er had known thee !

ST. PIERRE.

It were strange if want
Look'd like abundance—which was never yet
Akin to it.

FERRARDO.

Here, take my purse !

ST. PIERRE.

'Tis rich—
Holds it a hundred ducats ?

FERRARDO.

Twice the sum—
I want thee—that suffice.

ST. PIERRE.

That does suffice !

FERRARDO.

Get thee habiliments more rich than these,—
Appointments, too, fit to consort with them ;
And come thou to mine ancient mansion straight.

ST. PIERRE.

I must dine first.

FERRARDO.

Eat sparingly.

ST. PIERRE.

Indeed !

I see thou want'st me then.—I'll go and dine.

FERRARDO.

Thy tears are not a pledge for continence.

ST. PIERRE.

I'll dine upon a crust ! Nay, fear me not—
What time am I to take in all?—two hours ?

FERRARDO.

The half might serve thee.

ST. PIERRE.

Well ; we'll say the half,—
The quarter shall suffice me, if thou wilt !

FERRARDO.

Make it as brief as may be.

ST. PIERRE.

Work that's sweet

Is quickly done.—I'll come in half an hour.

[*Exit.*]

FERRARDO.

That which had been my bane an hour ago
Is now my medicine ! This fellow owns
A quick and subtle wit ; a reckless daring ;
And hath a winning tongue withal and 'haviour ;
Easy of conscience too—yet still contrived
To keep some credit with the court. I know
The use of him ! He has been mine, and mine
He needs must be again. So !—Suddenly
He quitted Mantua, and left with none
A clue to find the cause,—nor lack'd he then
Wardrobe or ducat ; misery has changed him ;—
Her work abundance quickly shall undo !
I know the use of him and I will use him.

Enter COUNT FLORIO.

Now, Count, what brings you hither ?

FLORIO.

News, my Lord,
Ensures my welcome ! A brief honeymoon
Hath fate decreed your cousin : scarce he takes
The seat were fitter yours, and weds his bride,
Ere comes advice the states must take the field
Against the power of France.

FERRARDO.

Good news, indeed !

FLORIO.

Forthwith he hies to Rome—

FERRARDO.

Most welcome news !

FLORIO.

And, by entreaty of his council, you—
As next in rank and lineage—are appointed
Our regent in his absence.

FERRARDO.

That's the best news !

FLORIO.

His heart, that was against you, softened
By prosperity, or by your ready yielding,
Or giving way to the sudden exigence,—
He offers reconciliation by your friends,
And straight you are invited to his presence.

FERRARDO.

I come ! great news—I thank you—glorious news !

[*Exeunt.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—AN APARTMENT IN THE PALACE.

—
Enter FERRARDO and FLORIO.

FERRARDO.

ANOTHER victory !

FLORIO.

So the rumour runs.

FERRARDO.

Why fortune plays the minion to him ! Does
His wish not only, but anticipates it !
Chief after chief she thrusts aside, that he
May head the war, and, when he takes the lead,
Her moody favour, wavering before—
Alternate sun and cloud—shines fully forth
With strong and steady beam.—Have many fallen ?

FLORIO.

A host, 'tis said, on either side.

FERRARDO.

No wound,
No hurt for him ?

FLORIO.

'Tis so reported.

FERRARDO.

Ha !

FLORIO.

Tho' twice he changed his charger—one disabled,
The second wounded mortally !

FERRARDO.

And he
As safe as sitting in his ducal chair !
Why dangers, that are thorns to other men,
For him do change to flowers !

FLORIO.

The Duchess still
Persists in her seclusion.

FERRARDO.

There again
I'm baffled ! would she mingle with the court,
I'd make for him the home of peace what fails
The field of war to prove. I know my cousin,—
For boyhood, thoughtless, often shows the man
Which manhood, wary, hides. A sense he has,
That's sickly tender to the touch of shame.
I have seen him, at a slight imputed fault
Colour to flame—anon grow ashy pale—
The dew in drops upon his forehead starting,—
His tongue without its use—his mouth agape—
His universal frame vacuity
Of action and of power,—and anon
The glare, and din, and tossing of the tempest !
To wound his honour to the quick, would be
To sting his core of life !

FLORIO.

Thou couldst not hope
To wound it thro' his wife—whose love for him,
Gives, in his absence, all things to neglect !
Her bounding palfrey cannot woo her forth ;
The palace vibrates with the dance, and still
She keeps her lonely cell. You talk to her
Of plays and shows—a statue lists to you :
She visits no one—no one she receives.
What chance of practising upon a wife,
Who, for an only absent lord, observes
A sterner widowhood, than many hold
In honour of a dead one !—why do you smile ?

FERRARDO.

To think, to what account a little art
Might turn a little swerving, in a case
Of self-denial, carried thus like her's
To the admir'd extreme ! I would St. Pierre
Had kept his restless spirit more in check,
Paid to my will submission, as he used,
And not enlisted in my cousin's train,
But stopp'd in Mantua ! My plans were laid
Were sure, and long ere this had been matured,
But for his wilfulness.

FLORIO.

Of what avail
Had been his presence here ?

FERRARDO.

I should have found

A use for him. Ne'er knew I yet the ear
 He could not keep a hold of, once he caught it.
 That fellow with his tongue has won more hearts
 Than any twenty men in Mantua,
 With tongues, and forms, and faces! I had contriv'd
 To throw him in her way.

FLORIO.

There were no chance—

FERRARDO.

I know,—but I could make appearances
 Supply the place of facts—especially
 In her husband's absence—so that confidence
 Itself would construe guilt where no guilt was!
 So would I show her to the eyes of all,
 That, tho' she were the snow itself, new fallen,
 Men would believe her spotted!

FLORIO.

If 'tis true
 That he was charg'd with the despatches hither
 Of this new victory—

FERRARDO.

Saint Pierre?

FLORIO.

Saint Pierre.

FERRARDO.

'Tis so reported?

FLORIO.

'Tis.

FERRARDO.

Then, proves it true,

Before he is an hour in Mantua
 He must be stripp'd of every ducat! Mind,
 Of that must thou take care! (*Shouts.*)
 What mean those shouts?

FLORIO.

They herald, doubtless, the approach of him,
 That's bearer of the news.

FERRARDO.

If 'tis Saint Pierre
 The moment he alights, away with him
 To a house of play—you are his master—haste!
 Your signal he will answer readily,
 As doth the bird of game his challenger!

FLORIO.

I'll do my best.

[*Exit.*

FERRARDO.

So do.—The confessor!
 The cards come round to me! A score to one,
 I hold the winning hand.—His reverence,
 I have contriv'd to make at last my friend.
 Your churchman dearly loves a convertite,
 And he believes me his. A kindly man,
 But, once resolved, to error positive:—
 And, from his calling, credulous to weakness
 Touching the proneness of the flesh to sin—
 I have well consider'd him.

Enter ANTONIO.

Your blessing, father.

ANTONIO.

Thou hast it, son.

FERRARDO.

Whence come you now? No doubt
From the performance of some pious deed—
The shriving of some sin-oppressed soul—
The soothing of some sorrow-stricken heart—
Or sweet relieving of some needy child
Of merciless adversity.

ANTONIO.

No, my son,—
But from a trespasser that's yet unshriven;
A daughter who has swerv'd, and on whose soul
I had thought as soon to find the soil of sin
As tarnish upon new-refined gold!
A wife, who in the absence of her lord,
Liv'd like thy cousin's wife; with means to bless
Desires incontinent; a miracle
Of self-secluded, lonely chastity.

FERRARDO.

He comes in the very vein! You spoke just now
Of my cousin's wife. There's news of my dear cousin,
And, with submission, I would recommend
Her grace to show herself to day. Methinks,
If only for her health, she keeps herself
Too much alone.

ANTONIO.

So have I told her grace.

FERRARDO.

Indeed! I marvel that she perseveres

In the face of your admonishment ! More strict
Would she be thought, than you, a holy man
Would counsel her to be ? Forgive me, father,
If 'tis uncharitable in me, but
I never lov'd extremes ! Your constant weather
Is still the moderate, father. Storms and calms
Are brief.

ANTONIO.

You are right, my son.

FERRARDO.

I had been pleased
Less had she shown her fondness for her lord.
Love, of its own fidelity assur'd,
Ne'er studies the display on't !

ANTONIO.

Nay—she loves
Her lord.

FERRARDO.

And yet 'tis the predicament
Of love to wane upon possession. Where
I see much guard, I ever do infer
Some doubt ; I do not mean deliberate—
Instinctive only. Passion is passion, father,
Earth, which the nigher we draw to heaven, the more
We cast away.

ANTONIO.

You reason well, my son.

FERRARDO.

I would not have you think I doubt her Grace !

Yet had she more confided in herself,
 Liv'd like herself—appeared among the court—
 Courteous to all—particular to none,
 Save those to whom, next to her lord, she owes
 Her highest duty—my reliance on her
 Were stronger! Is't uncharitable, father,
 To say so?—speak, and frankly—Wherefore else
 Put I my heart into your saintly hands?

ANTONIO.

Nay, son—I think you speak in charity
 As one who blames through love. We'll see the Duchess,
 And jointly recommend to her a life
 Of less severe restraint.

FERRARDO.

I thank your reverence!
 You know I owe her grace some small amends,
 And trust me, father, gladly would I make them! [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—ANTI-ROOM TO THE CHAMBER OF
 THE DUCHESS—A WINDOW OVERLOOKING
 THE STREET.

Enter FLORIBEL.

FLORIBEL.

A merry life for twenty-one to lead,
 And in a wonian too! from morn till night
 Mew'd in a lonely tower! Heigho! It is

My lady's will. I would she had been born
In Mantua, where wives their husbands love
In reason! Well!—We'll live in hope she'll learn
In time. I used to lead a dozen kinds
Of life in a day!—Now, in a dozen days
I lead but one! Ere breakfast, was a nun;
Then play'd the housewife; after that, to horse;
Then, dinner o'er, a Naiad on the lake,
Floating to music! Evening changed the scene
Again; and night again,—which I did close
In my balcony, list'ning by the moon
The melting cadence of the serenade!
Now morning, evening, noon, and night are nought—
But morning, evening, noon, and night. No change
Save in their times and names! What I get up
I last throughout the day, and so lie down,
The solitary lady of the Duchess!
And how I bear it! Wonderfully! Past
Belief! I'll do't no longer! If I do,
Then never was I born in Mantua. (*Shouts.*)
What's that? the city all astir!—a crowd
Before the palace—I will ope the casement:—
I feel as I could leap into the street! (*Opens Casement.*)

Enter MARIANA.

MARIANA.

What do you at the casement, Floribel?

FLORIBEL.

Look from it, Madam.

MARIANA.

That I see. At what
Is it you look ?

FLORIBEL.

At happy people, Madam,—
Some standing, others walking, others running ;
All doing what they list—like merry birds
At liberty.

MARIANA.

Come from the casement—shut it.

FLORIBEL.

Nay, rather you approach it, Madam ! Do !
And look from't too—there's news, and from your lord !
Look—there's the courier !

MARIANA (*approaching the window*).

Where ?

FLORIBEL.

That cavalier,
Who tries to pass along, but cannot, so
The throng do press upon him.

Enter FERRARDO and ANTONIO.

FERRARDO (*aside to ANTONIO*).

At the casement !

MARIANA.

Who is that cavalier ?

FLORIBEL.

The courier, Madam.

MARIANA.

I know—but who is he ?

His family—his name? I cannot take
My eyes from his face! who is he? Can't you tell?
I have a strange desire to know his name!

FERRARDO (*aside to ANTONIO*).

Father!

FLORIBEL.

I'll fly and learn it.

MARIANA.

Do, good girl!

And soon as you have learn'd, fly back again!

FERRARDO (*aside to ANTONIO*).

I pray you mark, but speak not—

(*Approaches the window on tiptoe, returns,
and speaks to himself.*)

It is St. Pierre!

Incredible! (*To ANTONIO.*) It is the courier, father,
Of whom they were discoursing.

MARIANA.

I have lost him!

He has entered the palace—I should like again
To see him—I should like to speak to him!

FERRARDO (*aside to ANTONIO*).

My life on't she will hold a court to-day—
Accost her, father.

ANTONIO.

Benedicite,

Fair daughter.

MARIANA.

Father!—What, his grace!—I think,
Or I mistake, there's news from my dear lord?

ANTONIO.

Madam, there is, and happy news.—Your lord
Has won another victory !

FERRARDO.

All Mantua
Would have a heart of overflowing joy,
Would but your Highness notify your will
To let it speak its happiness, and pay
Congratulations to you.—May I hope
You do not pause from doubt? Your confessor
Approves your Highness somewhat should relax
Your life of close seclusion.

MARIANA (*after a pause*).

Be it so.

FERRARDO (*aside to ANTONIO*).

I told you, father— (FLORIBEL *re-enters*.)

FLORIBEL.

Madam, he is call'd—

FERRARDO.

St. Pierre—you mean the courier
That brought these happy tidings?

MARIANA.

Floribel,

I want your aid. My lord, and reverend father,
Soon as my toilet's made I shall descend.

[*Exeunt MARIANA and FLORIBEL.*

ANTONIO.

What kind of man is this?

FERRARDO.

A kind of devil,

That grasps you with his eye, as fascinate
Serpents, 'tis said, their prey:—a tongue to match,
In glosing speech, the master fiend himself!
I'm troubled, father. Was the dame you spoke of
Indeed a pattern, like my cousin's wife,
Of saintly self-denial?

ANTONIO.

Yes, my son.

FERRARDO.

I grieve we urg'd her Highness with her presence
To grace the court to day. I tremble for her.
Come! Shall I tell thee something—No, I will not!
When you can lead the sea, you'll sound the depth
Of woman's art.—Would you believe it—No—
While there's a doubt suspicion should be dumb.
Think'st thou I would have back'd her guardian's suit
But that I knew he had his reasons?—'Sdeath!
What am I doing?—Come, your reverence,
The man of proper charity condemns not,
Except upon enforcement. All is right!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.—A ROOM IN THE PALACE.

Enter FLORIO and COSMO.

FLORIO.

Where is the Regent?

COSMO.

With the confessor
In the chamber of the Duchess. Nay, my lord,
He has quitted it, and is here.

FLORIO.

You may withdraw. *(Exit COSMO on one side,
Enter FERRARDO on the other.)*

FERRARDO.

Well? where's St. Pierre?—I thought you were together!

FLORIO.

We were, but parted for a moment. Fortune,
In the task you set me, kindly has forestalled me.
Halting to bait within some miles of this
He met a friend, whose hand he scarce had shaken
Ere the ready dice were out. In brief, your grace,
He has entered Mantua ducatless!—Of my own counsel
I broke to him your need of his assistance,
Touching your cousin's wife—and promis'd him
A pledge, I knew your Highness will redeem,
Replenished coffers, would he undertake
To pleasure you.

FERRARDO.

Will he do it?

FLORIO.

Sullenly,
But fully he consented—he is here.

FERRARDO.

Retire a little.

(COUNT retires.)

Enter ST. PIERRE.

Welcome, St. Pierre!—welcome my friend!—I'm glad
To see you.

ST. PIERRE.

Would you take me for a knave?

FERRARDO.

What mean you?

ST. PIERRE.

Would you take me for a knave?

FERRARDO.

No.

ST. PIERRE.

No? Why then I'm fit to do your pleasure.
Come!—to my work—when am I to begin?

FERRARDO.

The matter?

ST. PIERRE.

I have lived an honest life
These six months—knavery is new to me!
I set about it feverishly.

FERRARDO.

What!

Is't knavery to net a pretty woman?
They catch birds so.

ST. PIERRE.

Pshaw!—I am past the time.

FERRARDO.

Mind is the brightness of the body—lights it,
When years, its proper but less subtle fire
Begins to dim. Man, I could tell thee how

She conn'd thy visage from her casement ; sent
 Her confidante to learn thy name ; seemed lost
 At losing thee ! Win thou discourse with her,
 And hold it when thou winn'st it,—'twill content me
 Thou make her but the object of remark.
 Away ! Go lean on yonder pedestal,
 And watch thy opportunity to draw
 Her notice towards thee—Thy obeisance does it ;
 Or anything most slight ;—her lord's success
 Is plea that you accost her ; she is new
 To the court,—a stranger to its law of distance,
 Which 'tis expedient thou infringe.—Couldst master
 Aught that's about her person—say a ring,
 A brooch, a chain, in curiosity
 Besought of her for near inspection, then
 Mislaid or dropp'd—not to be found again,—
 It were a thousand ducats in thy hand.
 'Sdeath, man, hold up thy head, and look at fortune,
 That smiles on thee, and asks thee to embrace her !
 What dost thou gaze at ?

ST. PIERRE.

Who is that ?

FERRARDO.

The Duchess.

ST. PIERRE.

Indeed, a lady of surpassing beauty !

FERRARDO.

An irksome task, methinks, I've set you—Come !
 About it ! to thy post !

ST. PIERRE.

Surpassing fair !

[*Exit.*]

FERRARDO (*looking after him*).

He has caught her eye already,—excellent !
 He bows to her ! Does she curtsey ?—yes, i'faith !
 And to the very ground ! You're welcome, Sir !
 He speaks to her ! How takes she his advances ?
 She entertains them ! They pass on in converse !
 Hold it but on, she's lost ! (*FLORIO comes down*).
 Do you see ?

FLORIO.

So soon !
 I wish him fortune ! As I loved her once
 I even loathe her now !

FERRARDO.

Could you believe it ?
 He crosses her, and straight her eye is caught !
 He speaks, and straight is master of her ear !
 Solace for baffled hopes ! From infancy
 I loath'd my cousin for his elder right,
 And leap'd into his seat with lighter spring,
 That he, I thought, had miss'd it ! He returns,
 And I, with humbled brow, in sight of all
 Descend, that he may mount ! I'll pay him shame
 For shame ;—but he shall have't with interest !
 Where is the confessor ? I must to him.
 Mix with the company, and point to them
 The eye of questioning remark : with looks
 Speak sentences !—More surely does not raise
 One wave another wave, than marvel grows
 On marvel.—Interjections have a world

Of argument ! “ Incredible ! ” — “ Odd ! ” — “ Strange ! ”
 Will make a thousand hearers prick their ears,
 And conjure wonders out of commonest things !
 Then with commiseration you may do
 A murder easily ! “ Alack ! ” “ Alas ! ”
 Use daggers that seem tears.—Away ! Away !
 For now or never is the golden hour ! [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.—ANOTHER ROOM IN THE PALACE.

Enter MARIANA *and* SAINT PIERRE.

MARIANA.

I thank you for the story of your travels :
 You make me wish to see the world, of which
 Such wonders you relate. I think you said,
 You were but newly come to Mantua ?
 You must have been in Mantua before, then,
 So many seem to know you.

ST. PIERRE.

I have been
 Before in Mantua.

MARIANA.

'Tis very strange,
 But when I saw thee first I felt as if
 We were of old acquaintance ! have we met
 Before ?

ST. PIERRE.

No, lady.

MARIANA.

It is very strange,
You have never been in Switzerland?

ST. PIERRE.

Oh, yes,
It is my birth-place.

MARIANA.

Ay! so is it mine.
'Tis a dear country! never met we there?

ST. PIERRE.

No.

MARIANA.

No! 'tis odd! how many years is't since
You were in Switzerland?

ST. PIERRE.

'Tis fifteen years.

MARIANA.

So long! I was an infant then—no, no,
We have not met before—'Tis odd—at least
You are my countryman! (*Holding out her hands to him.*)

(Visitors have been occasionally crossing the stage during this scene, observing MARIANA and ST. PIERRE. Enter in the background, ANTONIO and FERRARDO.)

FERRARDO.

Had I been told it,
I would not have believed it.

MARIANA.

Switzerland

Is a dear country ! Switzerland !

ST. PIERRE.

It is

The land of beauty, and of grandeur, lady,
 Where looks the cottage out on a domain
 The palace cannot boast of. Seas of lakes,
 And hills of forests ! crystal waves that rise
 'Midst mountains all of snow, and mock the sun,
 Returning him his flaming beams more thick
 And radiant than he sent them.—Torrents there
 Are bounding floods ! and there the tempest roams
 At large, in all the terrors of its glory !
 And then our valleys ! ah, they are the homes
 For hearts ! our cottages, our vineyards, orchards,—
 Our pastures studded with the herd and fold !
 Our native strains that melt us as we sing them !
 A free—a gentle—simple—honest people !

MARIANA.

I see them, Signor,—I'm in Switzerland !
 I do not stand in Mantua !—dear country !
 Except in one thing, I'm not richer, Signor,
 Than when I was a child in Switzerland,
 And mistress only of this little cross. (*Pressing the cross to
 her breast.*)

ST. PIERRE (*anxiously.*)

Your pardon, lady ! Pray you let me see
 That cross again !

MARIANA.

Right willingly.

ANTONIO (*coming forward.*)

Hence, Signor !

MARIANA.

Father !

ANTONIO.

I pray your grace retire—but first
Command that libertine from the apartment !

ST. PIERRE (*sternly surveying alternately ANTONIO
and FERRARDO.*)

I go, your reverence, of mine own accord.

[*Exit, followed by FERRARDO.*

MARIANA.

Father, what meant you by that word which turned
My very blood to ice ?

ANTONIO.

Behoves your highness
To keep your eye upon your husband's honour,
If not upon your own !

MARIANA.

How !

ANTONIO.

Heaven alone
Can judge the heart;—men must decide by actions,
And yours to night to all have given offence.

MARIANA.

Offence !

ANTONIO.

A woman hath in every state

Most need of circumspection ;—most of all
 When she becomes a wife !—she is a spring
 Must not be doubted ; if she is, no oath
 That earth can utter will so purge the stream
 That men will think it pure.

MARIANA.

Is this to me?

ANTONIO.

Women who play the wanton—

MARIANA.

Father !

ANTONIO.

Daughter !

That look and tone of high command become
 Thy state indeed.

MARIANA.

No, father, not my state—

They become me !—state greater—higher far,
 One who deserved that name I blush'd to hear—
 And thou, a reverend man, should'st blush to use—
 Might fill ! but though it were an empress's,
 I would defy her in her breast to seat
 The heart that's throned in mine ! If 'tis a crime
 To boast—heaven pardon you—you have made me sin !

ANTONIO.

Behoves us heed appearances ?

MARIANA.

No, father,

Behoves us heed desires and thoughts ! and let

Appearances be what they may be—you
Shall never shape them so, that evil men
Will not their own construction put upon them.
Father, it was the precept of my father.

ANTONIO.

He little knew the world.

MARIANA.

He knew what's better,
Heaven, and the smile of his own conscience !
What have I done ?

ANTONIO.

Given cause of scandal, daughter.

MARIANA.

How ?

ANTONIO.

By a preference so mark'd, it drew
The eyes of all upon you.

MARIANA.

Evil eyes—
Which see defect in frank and open deeds !
The gentleman appeared mine old acquaintance—
That drew me towards him :—I discovered now
He was my countryman—that makes allies
Of even foes that meet in foreign lands,
Then well may couple strangers :—he discours'd
Of my dear native country, till its peaks,
Began, methought, to cleave the sky, as there
They stood before me !—I was happy—pleas'd
With him that made me so—Out of a straw
To raise a conflagration !

ANTONIO.

You forget
 You are not now the commissary's ward,
 But consort to the Duke of Mantua.—
 You're a chang'd woman.

MARIANA.

No, i'faith, the same !
 My skin is not of other texture—This,
 My hand, is just the hand I knew before !
 If my glass tells the truth, the face and form
 I have to-day, I had to-day last year !
 My mind is not an inch the taller grown
 Than mellowing time hath made it in his course !
 And, for my heart—it beats not in my breast,
 If, in the ducal chair of Mantua,
 'Tis not the same I had, when I did sit
 On some wild turret of my native hills,
 And burn with love and gratitude to heaven
 That made a land so fair, and me its daughter !

ANTONIO.

Hear me ! You have wronged your lord.

MARIANA.

I have wrong'd my lord !
 How have I wrong'd my lord ?

ANTONIO.

By entertaining
 With mark'd and special preference, a man
 Until to-day a perfect stranger to thee.

MARIANA.

Go on !

ANTONIO.

He is a libertine.

MARIANA.

Go on !

ANTONIO.

A woman who has such a friend has nought
To do with honest men ?

MARIANA.

Go on !

ANTONIO.

A wife

Has done with friends !—her heart, had it the room
Of twenty hearts, her husband ought to fill,—
A friend that leaves not space for other friends,
Save such as nature's earliest warrant have
To house there.

MARIANA.

You are right in that ! Go on.

ANTONIO.

A court's a place where men have need to watch
Their acts and words not only, but their looks ;
For prying eyes beset them round about,
That wait on aught but thoughts of charity.
What were thy words I know not, but thy acts
Have been the comment of the Court to-day.
Of eyes that gap'd with marvel—groups that stood
Gazing upon thee—leaning ears to lips,
Whose whispers, were their import known to thee,
Had stunn'd thee worse than thunder !

MARIANA.

So! Go on.

ANTONIO.

What if they reach thy consort?

MARIANA.

What!

ANTONIO.

Ay, what!

MARIANA.

He'll spurn them as he ought; as I do spurn them.
 For shame! for shame! Me thou shouldst not arraign,
 But rather those who basely question me!
 Father, the heart of innocence is bold!
 Tell me, how comes your Court to harbour one
 Whom I should blush to speak to? If its pride
 Be not the bearing that looks down on vice,
 What right has it to hold its head so high?
 Endure at Court what from our cottage door
 My father would have spurn'd!—If that's your Court,
 I'll be nor slave nor mistress of your Court!
 Father, no more! E'en from thy reverend lips
 I will not hear what I've no right to list to.
 What!—taint my lord with question of my truth!
 Could he who prov'd my love on grounds so broad
 As I have given my lord, on grounds so mean
 Descend to harbour question of my love—
 Though broke my heart in the disseverment,
 He were no longer lord or aught of mine!
 Father, no more! I will not hear thee! Frown—
 Heaven does not frown!—to heaven I turn from thee.

[Exit.]

ANTONIO.

This confidence offends me.—Swerving virtue
Endureth not rebuke—while that, that's steadfast,
With smiling patience suns the doubt away,
Wherewith mistrust would cloud it! 'Tis not right—
An eye so firm-resentful—speech so lofty—

(*MARIANA enters unperceived and kneels to him.*)

An air of such defiance—

MARIANA.

Father!

ANTONIO.

Daughter!

MARIANA.

I am thy daughter! O my father, bless me!
Were I the best, I were not 'bove thy charity,
Were I the worst, I should not be beneath it!

ANTONIO.

Thou hast my blessing.

MARIANA.

Ere I break my fast
To-morrow, father, I'll confess to thee,
And thou shalt know how little or how much
I merit what thou giv'st me! so, good night!

ANTONIO.

Good night, fair daughter. Benedicite! (*Exeunt severally.*)

END OF ACT THE THIRD.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—A STREET.

—
Enter BARTOLO, BERNARDO, CARLO, *and others.*

BARTOLO.

HUSH, Signors! speak softly! 'Tis treason, and we may be hanged for it.—So the matter stands! The young Duchess, I fear me, is an old sinner—and what a saint she looked! Let no man marry a wife who looks like a saint. Please Providence, mine shall be 'as ill-favoured as Satan!

BERNARDO.

'Tis a way to make sure of a wife.

BARTOLO.

It is, Signor. Such is the value of beauty. Let any man take his own case. Now myself, for instance—how many a scrape should I have avoided had I been born as ill-favoured as some people! He is the happiest man, be assured, whom no one has reason to envy.—Now, thou art a happy man, Bernardo.

BERNARDO.

I thank you, Signor Bartolo.

CARLO.

But when happened this?

BARTOLO.

I told you it happened about half an hour ago.

BERNARDO.

Prithee, Signor, tell it us again?

BARTOLO.

Well then, draw near, and remember you are sworn to secrecy.

ALL.

We are, we are!

BARTOLO.

You know I am fond of the news—though I have as little curiosity as any man. Well, where can one get news if not at the palace? So, to the palace I went this morning, as I do every morning.—Few persons have admittance at the palace as I have, for they are people of discretion at the palace, and suffer not rogues that come peeping and prying—spies and blabbers—scoundrels of no trust or honesty—but I have admittance to the palace, for they know me.—

BERNARDO.

Well!

BARTOLO.

When I entered it all was confusion! One running this way, another that way. One whispering this person, and every one with wonder in his looks! I warrant you I did not look the figure of wonder too.

CARLO.

Go on, good Bartolo.

BARTOLO.

Well: I happen to have a friend or two at the palace.—Lucky for me that I have so—there is no doing anything

there without a friend.—“ Would that such a one was here,” said I to myself; and scarce had I said it, when in runs the very man I was thinking of.

BERNARDO.

Excellent!

BARTOLO.

Just in the nick of time, or I verily believe I should have died of wonder;—at the same time, every one knows I am the least curious man in all Mantua. Well, in runs my friend, just in the nick of time.—“ The matter?” cried I. “ Treason,” whispered he, “ but I dare not breathe it for my life.”—“ What is it?” said I; “ I’ll be as mute as the marble under my feet.”—“ You shall hear it,” cried he, “ for you are a lad of discretion, and have a guard upon your tongue.” You see, Signors, that I have a character at the palace.

BERNARDO.

Go on, Bartolo.

BARTOLO.

Well; as I told you before, the substance was this—and nothing more nor less:—Julian St. Pierre, who has lately returned to the court, and for his wild practices would have been dismissed from it many a year ago, but for the favour of the Duke Ferrardo,—this Julian St Pierre, I say, was half an hour ago discovered stealing from the anti-room that leads to the Duchess’s chamber, and secured upon the spot.

BERNARDO *and* CARLO.

Go on!

BARTOLO.

I have no more to tell you—you know as much as I do.—

But be discreet! a silent tongue betokens a wise head! I cannot stay with you longer. I have some friends in the next street to see; others in the street beyond! more again, in the street beyond that! I know not how many I have to see! I have the whole city to see. Now be discreet!—remember I got it as I give it, on promise of secrecy—be discreet!—discovered half an hour ago, stealing from the anti-room that leads to the Duchess's chamber!—be discreet, I say—a silent tongue, a wise head!—Be discreet—be discreet!

[Exeunt severally.]

SCENE II.—ANTI-ROOM LEADING TO THE
DUCHESS' APARTMENT.

Enter MARIANA.

MARIANA.

Or I have had sweet dreams, whose fleeting forms
Have but the charm of their fair presence left;
Or by my couch hath some good angel watch'd,
And on my lapsed unconscious spirit breathed
The balmy fragrance of his heavenly visit;
So light my heart as it were clad with wings
And floated in the sun! My lord—my lord!
How is this? 'tis strange! at thought of my dear lord
My soaring heart hath dropp'd at once to earth.
It is the incidents of yesternight
The thought of him recalls!—I feel as tho'
I fear'd my lord! or is't the world I fear?

The world which yesternight I did defy,
 But now begin to think upon its snares,
 And feel, as they beset me round so thick,
 I cannot step but I do tread upon
 The precincts of perdition ! Blessed mother !
 My heart is heavy as just now 'twas light.

Enter ANTONIO.

My confessor ! here's comfort ! welcome, father.—
 For mercy's sake what's this ? I welcome thee,
 And thou to me giv'st aught, but an all hail !
 Why, what's the matter ? can I be awake ?
 Father, I need kind looks and words to day,—
 My heart is sick, oh earth, how sick ! I look'd
 For thee to bring me peace—alack ! alack !
 Why do your eyes of mercy turn to swords.
 Only they pierce where feeling is more quick !
 Father, be pitiful : 'tis not the proud
 And forward woman brav'd thee yesternight,
 But thy repentant daughter kneels to thee !

ANTONIO.

Repentance is a grace !—but it is one
 That grows upon deformity—fair child
 To an unsightly mother !—Nor, indeed,
 Always a grace !—'tis oftentimes—too oft,
 The bootless terror of the stranded soul,
 When ebbing passion leaves it all alone,
 Upon the bleak and dreary shoals of sin !—
 So is't of different kinds—which kind is thine ?

MARIANA.

Father !

ANTONIO.

Thy lord ! thy lord !

MARIANA.

What of my lord ?

ANTONIO.

Nay, rather answer thou, what of thy lord ?
I know that he is Duke of Mantua,
Noble, and fair, and good ! Hath high allies,
Heads the proud war in wisdom as in arms,
The foremost plume of the van ! and, crown of all,
I know he thinks himself, of every wish
Which heaves that breast of thine, the paramount,
The happy lord !

MARIANA.

He thinks himself—

ANTONIO.

And presses
The 'larum-curtain'd couch of restless war,
In hopes to change it for that downy one
Where he did leave, as he imagin'd, safe,
His dearest honour by thy side reposing,—
And little dreams that stain has reach'd there !

MARIANA.

That stain has reach'd it there !

ANTONIO.

You slept alone
Last night ?

MARIANA.

I slept alone?—yes—I did sleep alone!
What idle words are these?—I slept alone?
I know I slept alone last night!—the night
Before!—the night preceding that!—alone?
How could I otherwise than sleep alone,
When my dear lord's away?

ANTONIO.

Thou lookest—

MARIANA.

How?

ANTONIO.

And speak'st—

MARIANA.

How—how do I look and speak?

ANTONIO.

Like innocence.

MARIANA.

Dost doubt my innocence?

ANTONIO.

They say,

Thou didst not sleep alone!

MARIANA.

Who say so?

ANTONIO.

All

The palace.

MARIANA.

They!—I cannot speak the word,

Which doth imply the acting of a part
Unparallel'd in shame !

ANTONIO.

Another part,
Which doth involve a tenfold deeper shame,
They do refer the acting of to thee !

MARIANA.

Art thou my friend ?

ANTONIO.

Hast thou not proved me so ?

MARIANA.

I have. Forgive me that I questioned thee ;
But when I know my heart's supreme content
In its own clearness—not in act alone,
But wish ; nor wish alone, but thought of sin ;—
When I know this, and think of yesternight,
And worse than yesternight do find to-day,
I 'gin to think the world is made of hate,
And doubt if thou—e'en thou—art not thy foe !
Oh, do not be my foe ! indeed—indeed—
The helpless maid that hung upon thy robe
To beg protection, and received it there,
Unchanged in all—save that she is a wife,
And as a wife more bound than e'er to heaven—
In strait more piteous than she knelt in then,
Clings, kneeling, to it now ! What's said of me ?
And on what ground ?—for not the robe I hold
Less conscious is of ground of foul report
Than I am !

ANTONIO.

Left thy chamber any one
This morning, whom thy honour should forbid
To cross its threshold?

MARIANA.

No!

ANTONIO.

Art sure? 'tis said
There did—The man was seen!

MARIANA.

The man!

ANTONIO.

The man
Departing from this anti-chamber!—this,
Which none except thy lord, myself, and those
Who wait upon thy person, do frequent.

MARIANA.

Who was the man?

ANTONIO.

Seen in the very act
Of slinking from your door!

MARIANA.

Who was the man?

ANTONIO.

The same that last night held thee in discourse.

MARIANA.

I'm lost!

Enter FERRARDO, LORENZO, COSMO, and others.

FERRARDO.

Lady, by your leave, we wish
To pass into your chamber.

(FERRARDO and LORENZO pass in, the others remain.)

ANTONIO.

You are lost?

MARIANA.

I'm lost—but I am innocent!

FERRARDO *(returning with LORENZO)*.

My lords,
You know who owns this scarf?

COSMO.

It is St. Pierre's!

FERRARDO.

'Twas found beneath the couch—our advocate
Of state it was that saw it there:—are ye satisfied?

COSMO.

We are, your grace.

ANTONIO.

Find earth where grows no weed, and you may find
A heart wherein no error grows. I thought
Thy heart without one—thought it was a garden
So thickly set with flowers, no weed had room
To shoot there! Who would sin, who knew how shame
Confounds the trespasser! I cannot stay,—
My tears be vouchers for me that I lov'd her,
And fain would doubt the lapse I must allow. [*Erit.*

FERRARDO.

My worthy friends, follow the confessor,
I wish to speak in private with her highness.

[*Exeunt* LORENZO, COSMO, and LORDS.]

I am your friend! you are accused of treason,—
The grounds against you are conclusive ones;
Your judges will be those who will not spare you,
And soon and summary will be your trial;
The penalty of your offence is death!
You are now a prisoner.—I pity you,
Would save you!—Will! As soon as dusk sets in
In a convenient spot without the town,
To which in secret you shall be conveyed,
I shall have horses waiting—

(*MARIANA shrieks and starts up from her knee, on
which she had remained in a state of mental
stupefaction*).

Hush!

MARIANA.

For flight!

FERRARDO.

For flight!—by dawn you shall be far away
From Mantua.

MARIANA.

At dusk?

FERRARDO.

At dusk;—as soon
As dusk begins to fall expect me here,

And thou shalt have supply of gold enough
To pay the charges of thy journey—yea,
Maintain thee in abundance where thou wilt.

MARIANA.

I may depend upon thee?

FERRARDO.

Fear me not.

Remember now—at dusk.

MARIANA.

I will! at dusk!

[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE III.—ANOTHER CHAMBER IN THE
PALACE.

Enter FERRARDO.

FERRARDO.

His heart is in my power as 'twere a thing,
Which in my hand I held and I could crush
With a grasp! Nor can it 'scape my power! her name—
That flow'r of woman's pride, which ta'en away,
From a bright paragon she turns a thing
For basest eyes to look askant upon—
Is blasted past the power of rain and sun
To bring it to its pristine hue again.
Now for St. Pierre—he also must to-night
Take leave of Mantua. (*Unlocks door.*) Come forth, my
friend!

Enter ST. PIERRE.

Dost thou not know me? What an air is this?
A king could not a loftier assume
At high offence! 'Twas thus with thee last night,—
Nothing but moody looks,—until the Count
With much persuasion woo'd you to our feast:
I wondered at thee!

ST. PIERRE.

Are we alone?

FERRARDO.

What's this?

ST. PIERRE.

Are we alone? where are the craven minions
That overpower'd me in the corridor,
And at thy bidding dragg'd me hither?

FERRARDO.

Pshaw!

Art thou no wiser than to heed them? know'st not
'Twas done on my instruction—mine—thy friend's?

ST. PIERRE.

Are we alone?

FERRARDO.

We are alone.

ST. PIERRE.

Art sure
That door is unattended? that no minions
Watch it without?

FERRARDO.

I am.

ST. PIERRE.

Wilt lock it?

FERRARDO (*locking it and returning*).

There!

ST. PIERRE (*springing upon him*).

Villain!

FERRARDO.

What means this violence?

ST. PIERRE.

You struck me

When I contended with the recreants,
That smite this moment what the one before
They fawn'd upon!—Across their arms you struck,
And fell'd me with the blow!—now take it back!

FERRARDO.

Stop! you'll repent it if you strike!

ST. PIERRE.

I tell thee,

I ne'er received a blow from mortal man
But I did pay it back with interest!—One by one
I have parted with those virtues of a man
Which precept doth inculcate; but one grace
Remains—the growth of nature—the true shoot
Abuse could not eradicate, and leave
The trunk and root alive,—one virtue—manhood!
The brow whereon doth sit disdain of threat,
Defiance of aggression, and revenge
For contumely. You did strike me! Come!
I must have blow for blow!

FERRARDO (*drawing his dagger.*)

Let fall thy hand
Upon my person—lo, my dagger's free,
And I will sheath it in thy heart!

ST. PIERRE.

I care not,
So I die quits with thee!

FERRARDO.

I would not kill thee,
So don't advance thy hand! Nay, listen first,
And then, if thou wilt, strike me!—Strike!—abuse
Thy friend, who, when he struck thee, was thy friend
As much as he is now, or ever was;
Who struck thee but that he should seem thy foe,
To hide how much indeed he was thy friend;
Nay, if the lack of quittance for a blow—
Which but in show was one, for 'tis the thought
That makes the act—must constitute us foes,
My dagger's up! now give a blow indeed,
For one that seem'd but one.

ST. PIERRE.

I take't in thought,
And let thy person unprofaned go.

FERRARDO.

No animal so wild it will not tame,
Save man! Come, calm thyself, sit down—as yet
Thou know'st not whether to caress thy friend
Or tear him! Should'st thou tear him? Come, sit down.
There's not a man in Italy save thee

Would fret—and he the master all at once
 Of good ten thousand ducats ! Still a brow !
 Odd's man, be merry ! rub thy hands and laugh,
 Thou art rich—look here. (*Showing a casket.*)

ST. PIERRE.

How came I yesternight
 To sleep in the chamber of the Duke ? And why
 This morning when I left the anti-room
 Was I assaulted by thy minions ?

FERRARDO.

Pshaw !
 Enough, thou slept'st where thou didst sleep, next chamber
 To the Duke's wife, and thereby mad'st thy fortune.
 For every ducat of the sum I nam'd
 Is thine—but render me one service more.

ST. PIERRE.

Name it.

FERRARDO.

Just write for me in boasting vein,
 Confession thou did'st pillow yesternight
 There, where the honour of the Duke forbids
 That head save his should lie.
 Why do you gaze ? 'Tis easily done.

ST. PIERRE.

It is.

FERRARDO.

It takes but pen and ink, and here they are ;
 Make use of time ! the hour that is not us'd
 Is lost, and might have been the luckiest,
 Converted to account : what ponder'st thou ?

ST. PIERRE.

The manner best to execute thy wish :
I'm hardly in the vein—'twould put me into 't
Would'st thou relate the means whereby I came
To lie in the Duke's chamber.

FERRARDO.

'Twould retard thee !

ST. PIERRE.

No, it will rather help me. When I write
Ofttimes I miss the thought, too much intent
On finding it,—looking at something else,
Lo, there it stands before me of itself !
How came I in the chamber of the Duke ?

FERRARDO.

You supp'd, you may remember, with the Count
And me ?

ST. PIERRE.

I do.

FERRARDO.

'Twas plann'd between us.

ST. PIERRE.

Well ?

FERRARDO.

And for our end we kept the revel up—
I mean the Count and I—for, as I said
Before, thou wast not in the joyous vein,—
Till all the palace had retir'd to rest.

ST. PIERRE.

My lord, may't it please you stop—my thought has come.
A fair commencement ! excellent ! most fair !

You see how much you help me ! there—go on :
 You revell'd till the palace was at rest—
 What then ?

FERRARDO.

Why, then, finding thee jealous still
 Of the kindly grape, we drugg'd your cup, and when
 The potion work'd, conveyed you in your sleep,—
 To sound or stir profound as that of death,—
 Into the chamber of the Duke—of the key
 Of which I keep a duplicate—and there
 We laid you in his bed.

ST. PIERRE.

Break off again
 While I go on !—You see, my lord, how great
 A help you are to me ! It comes as fast
 As tho' I were inditing what you spoke—
 Your grace rehears'd to me. Most excellent :
 And now proceed again !

FERRARDO.

Where left I off ?

ST. PIERRE.

Where you had laid me in his Highness' bed.

FERRARDO.

You're right. There left we thee to sleep that night,
 With a partition only 'twixt his wife
 And thee,—and that made frailer by a door,—
 The lock of which I from its use absolved,
 And casting 'neath her Highness' couch thy scarf,
 As proof of closer neighbourhood to her,
 Withdrew to feast on foretaste of revenge.

ST. PIERRE.

Enough!

FERRARDO.

Enough?

ST. PIERRE.

Tut, tut! I only meant
Your Highness to break off, while I resume.
My thoughts do flow again—better and better!
Your Grace,—a hundred ducats, I have done
Almost as soon as you—go on—what end
Proposed your Highness to yourself by this?

FERRARDO.

To blast her name, and in the death of that
Involve my cousin's life! accordingly
By my direction wert thou watched and seized,
And hither brought as partner in a crime,
Whose penalty is death!—which thou shalt 'scape—
'Scape with enriched life—so ne'er again
Thou show'st thy face in Mantua, and keep'st
Thy counsel.

ST. PIERRE (*writing*).

Have you done?

FERRARDO.

I have.

ST. PIERRE.

And so
Have I—a fair commencement! better far
Continuation! and the winding up
The fairest of the whole! howsoe'er of that
Your Highness shall be judge:—'sdeath here's a word

I did not mean to write, for one I wanted!
I needs must take it out.—I pray your Highness
Lend me a knife.

FERRARDO.

I have not one.

ST. PIERRE.

Well then
Your dagger—if the edge of it is sharp.

FERRARDO.

There 'tis.

ST. PIERRE.

And there is the confession, Duke,
Sign it.

FERRARDO.

Why this is my confession!

ST. PIERRE.

Ay
Indeed your Highness?

FERRARDO.

Word for word.

ST. PIERRE.

You'll own
I'm something of a clerk—I hardly hop'd
It would have pleas'd your Highness! My Lord Duke,
Sign the confession.

FERRARDO.

Why?

ST. PIERRE.

It pleases me.
If that contents thee not, I'm in thy power,

And I'd have thee in mine! Your Highness sees
I am frank with you.

FERRARDO.

Can it be you, St. Pierre?

ST. PIERRE.

No—it is you!—and not the peasant lad,
Whom fifteen years ago in evil hour
You chanced to cross upon his native hills,—
In whose quick eye you saw the subtle spirit
Which suited you, and tempted it; who took
Your hint and followed you to Mantua
Without his father's knowledge—his old father,
Who, thinking that he had a prop in him
Man could not rob him of, and heaven would spare,
Bless'd him one night, ere he laid down to sleep,
And waking in the morning found him gone!

(FERRARDO *attempts to rise.*)

Move not, or I shall move—you know me!

FERRARDO.

Nay,
I'll keep my seat. St. Pierre, I trained thee like
A cavalier!—

ST. PIERRE.

You did—you gave me masters,
And their instructions quickly I took up
As they did lay them down! I got the start
Of my contemporaries!—not a youth
Of whom could read, write, speak, command a weapon,
Or rule a horse with me! you gave me all—
All the equipments of a man of honour,—

But you did find a use for me, and made
A slave, a profligate, and pander of me.

(FERRARDO *about to rise.*)

I charge you keep your seat!

FERRARDO.

You see I do!

St. Pierre, be reasonable!—you forget
There are ten thousand ducats.

ST. PIERRE.

Give me, Duke,

The eyes that look'd upon my father's face!

The hands that helped my father to his wish!

The feet that flew to do my father's will!

The heart that bounded at my father's voice!

And say that Mantua were built of ducats,

And I could be its duke at cost of these,

I would not give them for it! Mark me, Duke!

I saw a new-made grave in Mantua,

And on the head-stone read my father's name;—

To seek me, doubtless, hither he had come—

To seek the child that had deserted him—

And died here,—ere he found me.

Heaven can tell how far he wander'd else!

Upon that grave I knelt an altered man,

And rising thence, I fled from Mantua. Nor had return'd

But tyrant hunger drove me back again

To thee—to thee!—My body to relieve

At cost of my dear soul! I have done thy work,

Do mine! and sign me that confession straight.

I'm in thy pow'r, and I'll have thee in mine!

FERRARDO.

Art thou indeed in earnest ?

ST. PIERRE.

Look in my eyes.

FERRARDO.

Saint Pierre, perhaps I have underpaid thee ?

ST. PIERRE.

Sign !

FERRARDO.

I'll double the amount !

ST. PIERRE.

Come, sign !

FERRARDO.

Saint Pierre,

Will forty thousand ducats please thee ?

ST. PIERRE.

There's

The dial, and the sun is shining on it—

The shadow on the very point of twelve—

My case is desperate ! Your signature

Of vital moment is unto my peace !

My eye is on the dial ! Pass the shadow

The point of noon, the breadth of but a hair

As can mine eye discern—and, that unsign'd,

The steel is in thy heart—I speak no more !

FERRARDO.

Saint Pierre !—Not speak—Saint Pierre !

ST. PIERRE.

Is it signed ?

FERRARDO (*writing hurriedly.*)

It is !

ST. PIERRE.

Your signet, as a proof I am at large.

Now take my station in that closet—No

Attempt at an alarm—In, in I say!

Hold wind we'll make the port.—I thank your highness!

[Opens door, speaks aloud, and exit.]

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—A STREET IN MANTUA.
—

Enter BARTOLO and BERNARDO meeting.

BERNARDO.

WHITHER so fast, Bartolo ?

BARTOLO.

I know not ! Anywhere—everywhere. I would I were as many men as there are streets in Mantua, that I might be in every part of the city at the same time. Have you any news ?

BERNARDO.

No.

BARTOLO.

Nothing of St. Pierre ?

BERNARDO.

No.

BARTOLO.

Nothing of the Duchess ?

BERNARDO.

No.

BARTOLO.

I have fasted twelve hours together and upwards, and never hungered for a meal—as I hunger for news. Is not that Carlo ? Signor Carlo ! Hoa ! hilloa !—here—Signor Carlo !—make haste—make haste !

(Enter CARLO, running.)

CARLO.

Well, Signor Bartolo!—what's the matter?

BARTOLO.

Can you tell me any news?

CARLO.

No, Signor.

BARTOLO.

Nothing of the Duchess?

CARLO.

No.

BARTOLO.

Nothing of St. Pierre?

CARLO.

No.

BARTOLO.

Can I meet with no one who will tell me any news?

CARLO.

By the bye, a horseman just now alighted near the palace.

BARTOLO (*going to run off*).

Indeed!

CARLO.

Stop! you wont find him now.

BARTOLO.

Well?

CARLO.

He had ridden at full speed.

BARTOLO.

He had! Go on, Signor Carlo.

CARLO.

In less than a minute a crowd gathered round him—men, women, and children—asking all at once for the news.

BARTOLO.

Go on, dear Signor Carlo !

CARLO.

You never heard such a clatter—“ Have they found the Duchess ? ”—“ Have they caught St. Pierre ? ” “ The news ”—“ The news ! ” and not a soul would hold his tongue to listen to the news ; and what do you think it was ?

BARTOLO.

I am dying to know !

CARLO.

Why his wife had got scalded and he had come to town for a leech.

BERNARDO.

There's news for you at last, Signor Bartolo ! But whither were you running ?

CARLO.

To my breakfast—I have been up since four—have you breakfasted yet ?

BERNARDO.

No.

CARLO.

Wilt go home with me ?

BERNARDO.

I care not if I do ! But look at Signor Bartolo—what's the matter, Signor ?

BARTOLO.

I wonder if they will be overtaken—The poor Duchess !

BERNARDO.

Mark if he is not weeping—what a tender-hearted lad it is !

BARTOLO.

I am a tender-hearted lad, Signor Bernardo—I can cry by the hour! Tell me a doleful tale, and see if my handkerchief is not out.

BERNARDO.

And what are you weeping for now?

BARTOLO.

To think of the Duchess—if she should be caught. The poor Duchess—the fair Duchess! what a sight it would be! Though I had to walk a hundred miles, I'd come to see it.

BERNARDO.

What would you come to see?

BARTOLO (*crying*).

Her execution, Signor Bernardo. How I would hold my breath! How my heart would beat! How I would weep for the poor dear Duchess!

(*Enter MARCO, hastily.*)

MARCO.

They are caught! they are caught!

BARTOLO.

Are they, dear Signor Marco? kind Signor Marco—when, where, and how?

MARCO.

On the other side of the lake—ten minutes ago; and by half a dozen burghers that luckily fell in with them.

BARTOLO.

Oh dear! put your hand to my heart, Signor Carlo. Feel how it beats! Kind Signor Marco, go on! 'Tis all over with them!

MARCO.

And so it ought to be—two arrant thieves !

BARTOLO.

Thieves ! Signor Marco ! thieves !

MARCO.

Ay, thieves ! what else would you call them ? They found upon them a salver of gold, and two massy cups of the same metal, all marked with the duke's arms. If that is not thievery, I know not what is.

BARTOLO.

Signor Carlo—Signor Bernardo ! Heard you ever the like ? To carry off the Duke's plate ! Go on, dear Signor Marco,—how lucky I had not gone before you came—go on—do, prithee ! I suppose they will wait for the Duke before anything is done ?

MARCO.

Not they ! what need to wait for the Duke—summary justice will be done upon them.

BARTOLO.

Summary justice ! think of that ! O dear, Signor Bernardo ! Signor Carlo, O dear, I shall never be able to stand it.

MARCO.

Stand what ?

BARTOLO.

The sight—good, kind, dear Signor Marco, doesn't your heart bleed for them ?

MARCO.

Does yours, Signor Bartolo ?

BARTOLO.

It does ; look at my eyes. If you never saw rain from

a pair of eyes before, there 'tis for you. Rain pelting—
Signor Marco, pelting rain. Summary justice, say you?

MARCO.

Yes, they are to be whipt at noon.

BARTOLO.

Whipp'd! Bernardo!—Carlo! Whipp'd!—You do not
say whipp'd?

MARCO.

But I do!

BARTOLO.

Who are to be whipp'd?

MARCO.

Why the two rascals who broke into the Duke's jeweller's
last night.

BARTOLO.

What a fool you are, Signor Marco! I thought it was
St. Pierre and the Duchess that had been taken. And we
shall have no execution after all! See, Signors, see! A
horseman at full speed has just passed the end of the street,
in the direction of the palace. News—Signors, news!
Who makes the best use of his legs shall have the first on't.

(Exit running—the rest following.)

SCENE II.—A TENT.

LEONARDO *and Soldiers discovered.*

LEONARDO.

I'faith, a glorious close! our brief campaign
Hath pass'd like sport upon a summer's day,

Without a cloud :—a game, where fortune lay
 All on one lucky side—and that was ours !
 Give order for the striking of our tents
 At earliest dawn—I'll but salute the sun,
 And straight for Mantua. *(Exeunt Soldiers.)*

O sweet the sight
 Of his dear native land to him who brings
 A brow, with honours laden, back to it !
 Dear Mantua, that twice has given me life,
 Once in the breath which first I drew in it,
 Now in the gift, without the having which
 That breath were given in vain ! How does my wife,
 Bright crown of my bright fortunes ? O my heart—
 How does my love ?—the plume of victory
 I've won, but wear not till I see it nod
 In the bright mirror of her glistening eye.
 When shall that be ?—to-morrow ?—blest to-morrow !
 Would—would thou wast to-day !

Enter SECOND OFFICER.

OFFICER.

Your cousin, and the nobles who compose
 Your Highness' council, with your confessor,
 And advocate of state, attend without—in haste, and new
 From Mantua.

LEONARDO.

The tidings of our truce
 Can scarce have reached them yet ? Bad news flies quick,
 I deem'd not good was of so swift a wing.
 Admit them.

Enter FERRARDO, FLORIO, ANTONIO, LORENZO, *and*
NOBLES.

Welcome cousin—welcome all !

Note of our victory I see has reached you,
And ye are come to give me greeting, which
I gladly should have journeyed to receive :—
But where's my Duchess ? She had been, methinks,
A fair addition to your cavalcade—
You might have brought her with you.

(To FERRARDO, who drops his eyes.)

Strangers yet—

Nay, then, the fault, I'm positive, is yours.
Had you but dropp'd a hint of your intent,
And given a glance of invitation to her,
She would have ta'en it as a ready friend,
Given you her hand, and thank'd you for the leave
To bear you company.

FERRARDO.

Your Highness' pardon ;
A man can't help his doubts, e'en if he would,
And I have grounds, and solid ones, for mine.

LEONARDO.

Fie, fie—offend in any other thing,
And ere you ask you're pardoned ! Here are friends—
Friends of my love's and mine—tried friends, and yet
Not friends in this—to leave my wife behind
Who loves me best,—when they in zeal of love
Are here to give me joy of my high fortune.
How does my lady, friend ? How does she, father ?
Why comes she not to greet me ? You should be

Her harbingers—a step or two before?
 Or bring ye charge from her to expedite
 My long'd return to Mantua, as if
 My heart were not remembrancer enough?
 For never speed me, heaven, if life is life—
 If I do feel I live beneath the sun,—
 Am what I am, the very fool of fortune,—
 Until I stand in her sweet sight again.

(FERRARDO *and* FLORIO *whisper.*)

Why whisper ye?

(ANTONIO *and* LORENZO *whisper.*)

And ye do whisper, too—
 Hah! By your looks, I noted not before,
 Ye come to tell me of disaster! speak!
 The sum on't? 'Tis heavy—what is it?
 Come, name me the amount! Is it my dukedom?
 Or what?—'tis nothing of my wife—say that—
 And say aught else which stern misfortune prompts!
 Blow wind, mount wave,—no rock to shut me thence,
 I see the strand to run my bark ashore,
 And smile upon my shipwreck.

FERRARDO.

'Tis of her
 We come to speak.

LEONARDO.

'Tis no mishap to her—
 For you do speak in anger, not in grief.
 If what you come to say affects reproach—
 Reproach of her! speak out—speak ye the truth,
 Ye cannot speak in anger!

FERRARDO.

That our duty
Permitted us to leave you in that mind !

LEONARDO.

Pshaw ! do thy duty—be it duty—'tis
Beyond its power of other mind to make me.

FERRARDO.

Thy lady is false to thee.

LEONARDO (*drawing*).

Thy tongue is false
To thee !—It puts thy life in jeopardy ;
Recal thy words, or die !

FLORIO.

My gracious liege,
He speaks the truth !

LEONARDO.

Thou too !

LORENZO.

Your highness' patience.
What speaks your cousin, fain would I deny,
But cannot.

LEONARDO.

I do only doubt which way
To point my sword !

ANTONIO.

Your highness—

LEONARDO.

What say you ?
Speak out, thou reverend man !—there only wants
Thy tongue to prove how little heavenward do

The thoughts of men incline, when her—heaven's work—
 That bears, as never did a thing of earth,
 The glorious impress of its shining hand—
 These men would filch from heaven. Come, side with them,
 And say my wife is false !

ANTONIO.

My gracious liege,
 Restrain your ire at what you would not hear,
 And audience give to what you ought to hear.
 If facts, avouch'd by eyes, may be believ'd,
 I say—that would not say it—thou art wrong'd.
 Peruse that paper—there you have our grounds
 For saying what we say.

LORENZO.

O read, my liege !
 Think 'tis our duty speaks, and what it says
 Says at the cost of our unfeigned love,—
 Which, sooner than mischance should undermine
 Thy towering happiness, would be itself
 The seaward mole, to meet the rushing wave
 And break its fury ere it bursts on thee !
 But wind and tide together setting in
 Will sometimes overwhelm all obstacles—
 So needs must fall this heavy surge on thee
 Which we let o'er in drowning !

LEONARDO.

I read it—not
 That I do fear it—or give credence to it.

FERRARDO.

Your highness sees how fact doth hinge on fact.

LEONARDO.

No !—I see nothing !

FERRARDO.

Nothing !

LEONARDO.

Not a jot

That might not be contriv'd, and against which
Improbability doth not set its face.

My lord—my lord—you love me not—nor you—

Nor you.—I doubt if any loves me here :

I doubt all things but that my wife is true.

I will to Mantua, this very hour,

To crave her pardon that I listened to you.

FERRARDO.

My lord, she's fled from Mantua.

LEONARDO.

She is what ?

FERRARDO.

She's fled from Mantua, as also is

Her paramour.

LEONARDO.

Recal that word, or else

Thou mak'st me do a murder ! Is she fled ?

Cousin, thou murder'st me ! Speaks he the truth ?

Gainsay him, and I heed not what ye say !

Cousin, thou didst but hear that she was fled,

Thou dost not speak from thine own knowledge ?

FERRARDO.

Else

I had not spoken.

LEONARDO.

Fled—in company—

FERRARDO.

What else could I infer?—

LEONARDO.

Thou but infer'st it,
Come then, all's well!—Let her be fled or not,
She has fled perhaps to friends, perhaps to me!

Enter SECOND OFFICER with MARIANA.

SECOND OFFICER.

My liege, the Duchess.

LEONARDO.

Ha! I told you so!
Welcome, my lov'd—my wrong'd—my innocent—
Welcome, my loyal wife!

MARIANA.

My liege, stand off!
Embrace me at the peril of your honour!
Your cousin here! the Count! your confessor!
And he!—and these the members of your council!
My tongue may save its labour then. Yet whose
So fit to tell my husband, he's the lord
Of a dishonour'd bed,—as her's, whose heart,—
That ne'er admitted thought of man save him,
Knew not its part that was not given to him,
Before itself as dearer heart set him,
Sun, earth, life, health, desire, knew nought but him,—
Yet could not guard the jewel paramount
Of what it loved so well, but by an act

Without a motive—monstrous to belief—
 Which reason unto madness would refer—
 Nay doubt that even madness' self could do !
 What it so lov'd, did spoil, and bring at once
 From proudest wealth to basest penury.

LEONARDO.

No—thou did'st never swerve.—Truth dwells in thee !
 Thou art all radiant with it !

MARIANA.

Not a doubt !

My trusting lord ! my dear and honour'd lord !

(Throws herself at his feet.)

LEONARDO *(endeavouring to raise her)*.

Up to my heart !

MARIANA.

No—by thy love !

LEONARDO.

I say

I'll have thee up—thy place is here !

MARIANA *(preventing him)*.

My lord !

What holds that paper ? tell me, is it not

My accusation ? Let me see it—True

From first to last.—The facts not otherwise

Than here set down. Would'st take me to thy heart,

And this against me ?

LEONARDO.

Yes.

MARIANA.

Nay, speak again,

And think before you speak. Say that the Duke
Your cousin, loves you not ! say that the Count
Doth owe you grudge !—say these, the members of
Your highness' council, are suborn'd by them—
Here stand two honest men who take their side !
Wouldst take me to thy heart, and this against me ?

LEONARDO.

I would.

MARIANA.

And if you would, you should not do it !

LEONARDO.

It is a plot.

MARIANA.

It is—

But thou, my lord, must prove it to be one !
Else it hath op'd a chasm 'twixt thee and me,
Which, till thou close it up, or bridge it o'er
With stable-footed truth, that all may trust,
May not be cross'd.—Leap it—and all is lost !

LEONARDO.

Canst give me clue to find it out ?

MARIANA.

Methinks

I can. Thy cousin counsell'd me to fly,
To 'scape, as he did say, the penalty
Of my imputed crime,—but, as I thought,
To furnish of that crime conclusive proof :—
Supplied me too with ample store of gold.

LEONARDO.

Traitor ! I see it all—and do not you ?
My cousin and my subject tho' thou art,

To solemn mortal combat I defy thee !
That from thy lips, at point of my true sword,
Admission I extort of an attempt
To slur my lady's honour :—for thy soul
No shriving knows, no healing speech with priest,
Till by confession it heaves off that sin.
Come forth !

MARIANA.

No ! no ! let me be guilty thought,
But, oh ! in peril place not thou thy life !
Or let me prove myself my innocence
By ordeal of poison or of fire ;
Or take from me, of unpolluted blood,
Lucretia's proof of an unstained soul,
Unable to survive her body's shame.
Do aught but put thy life in jeopardy !

LEONARDO.

And she could injure me !

FERRARDO.

It is the trick
Of lapsed virtue to affect excess,
Which sound desert would sooner wrong itself
Than claim pretension to.

LEONARDO.

It is the trick
Of villany to lie. Come forth !

FERRARDO.

Lead on !

MARIANA (*embracing his knees*).

My lord ! my lord ! my husband !

LEONARDO.

Loose thine arms !

MARIANA.

It is mine heart-strings hold thee, not mine arms.
Wilt snap them? If thou wilt thou hast a right,
They are thine own !—but wilt thou use that right ?

LEONARDO.

Take her away ?

MARIANA.

When fails our dearest friend,
There may be refuge with our direst foe.

(Rushing up to FERRARDO.)

Oh ! why art thou my foe ? how lies my peace
Between thy good and thee ? Is it thy good
To slay my peace ? Wilt thou not look upon me ?
Alas ! thine eyes are better turn'd away !
For gazing on them, human as they are,
I have a feeling of a heart of stone !
And from my hopeless tears the spirit flies,
That frozen on my lids I feel them hang !
Thou rock ! Affliction did I plead to thee—
I turn from thee, Despair !

LEONARDO.

Come forth !

FERRARDO.

Lead on !

Enter ST. PIERRE behind.

MARIANA.

No way to hold thee from thy bloody purpose ?
Stop ! thou wilt do a murder ! Art thou sure

Thy wife is innocent? Thou know'st not what
 Thou go'st to do! Whate'er befalls, the sin
 Of all the deed 'tis I must answer for—
 The hapless wife that on thy house and thee
 Brought ruin!—have compassion on her soul,
 If not upon thy own—yet hear me—stop—
 I'll put an end to all!—I am—

FERRARDO.

Guilty!

MARIANA.

No!
 To save thy life—my own—and his that's heart
 Unto my life—I cannot speak the lie!

LEONARDO.

And if thou could'st I'd not believe thy tongue—
 Tho' Truth's as soon would lie.

FERRARDO.

No tongue on earth
 Can clear her—she is false—to eyes and ears
 Convicted!—She is an adultress!

ST. PIERRE (*rushing forward*).

Liar!
 She is as true as thou art false!

FERRARDO.

A caitiff
 That robb'd me, and did put my life in peril—
 But I'll be quits with him.

LEONARDO.

Prevent him!

(Several interfere, but not until ST. PIERRE is wounded.)

ST. PIERRE.

Not

Quite home, your Grace—yet near, I hope, enough!

Your Highness, you do hear a dying man;

Your wife is innocent!

FERRARDO.

A poor gallant

That would not say as much!

ST. PIERRE.

Your Highness, read

This paper! Hold his Grace!

FERRARDO.

'Twas forced from me.

ST. PIERRE.

Only the signature, my lord—the rest

Was voluntary—word for word—what fell

From his own lips.

FERRARDO.

You pass'd the night beside her—

Alone—none near you—within whisper of her!

Find pen to draw 'cross that!

ST. PIERRE.

I pray your Highness,

Wears not your wife a little rustic cross,

Carv'd by no craftsman's hand?

MARIANA.

I do—the same

I show'd thee when we spoke together.

ST. PIERRE.

'Twas
Your brother gave it you.

MARIANA.

It was.

ST. PIERRE.

I think,
Some fifteen years ago?

MARIANA.

So many years
Have pass'd since that dear brother gave it me.
I was a child then—he almost a man!

ST. PIERRE.

You woke one morning, did you not, and saw
That brother standing, weeping by your bed:—
He bless'd you, put that cross upon your neck,
Kiss'd you, and bade farewell to you, and went—
You never saw him more.—Pray you come near!
Oh God! my mother's face!

MARIANA.

My brother—Ambrose!

ST. PIERRE.

Yes, Mariana!

FERRARDO.

Is't a masque, your Highness,
They've got up to amuse you?

LEONARDO.

Hence with him!
The Count too!

FERRARDO.

I'm your slave, most gracious cousin,—
Yet is there one thing, wherein I am free.

LEONARDO.

And what is that ?

FERRARDO.

To hate thee ! and I do so !

[*Exeunt FERRARDO and COUNT attended.*]

MARIANA.

Brother, I said I knew thee ! Thou forgot'st
Thy sister's little face to woman's gown ;
But I remember'd thine enough to feel
'Twas something once had been familiar-dear !
O that my memory had better kept
What my heart treasur'd—thou did'st prove how well !
Wilt thou not speak to me ? Hear'st thou, my brother ?

ST. PIERRE.

Our father's cottage, Mariana !

MARIANA.

Ha !

Thou faintest !

ST. PIERRE.

No—it is nothing, sister !
What makes thee look so pale and vanishing ?
Don't go from me ! Alas—'tis I am going !
I have confess'd myself ! Pray for me, sister !
Mine eyes have lost thee !—But I feel thee still,
That's comfort !—yet—I have thee in my arms—
Thou fadest too from them—fast ! fast !—thou art gone !

[*ST. PIERRE dies.*]

EPILOGUE.

WRITTEN BY CHARLES LAMB. SPOKEN BY MISS
ELLEN TREE.

WHEN first our Bard his simple will express'd,
That I should in his Heroine's robes be dress'd,
My fears were with my vanity at strife,
How I could act that untried part—a "Wife."
But Fancy to the Grison hills me drew,
Where Mariana like a wild flower grew,
Nursing her garden-kindred: so far I
Liked her condition, willing to comply
With that sweet single life: when, with a cranch,
Down came that thundering, crashing, avalanche,
Startling my mountain-project! "Take this spade,"
Said Fancy then; "dig low, adventurous Maid,
For hidden wealth." I did; and, Ladies, lo!
Was e'er romantic female's fortune so,
To dig a life-warm Lover from the—snow? }

A Wife and Princess see me next, beset
 With subtle toils, in an Italian net ;
 While knavish Courtiers, stung with rage or fear,
 Distill'd lip-poison in a husband's ear.
 I ponder'd on the boiling Southern vein ;
 Rucks, cords, stilettos, rush'd upon my brain !
 By poor, good, weak Antonio, too disowned—
 I dream'd each night, I should be Desdemona'd :
 And, being in Mantua, thought upon the shop,
 Whence fair Verona's youth his breath did stop :
 And what if Leonardo, in foul scorn,
 Some lean Apothecary should suborn
 'To take my hated life? A "tortoise" hung
 Before my eyes, and in my ears scaled "alligators" rung.
 But *my* Othello, to his vows more zealous—
 Twenty Iagos could not make *him* jealous !

New raised to reputation, and to life—
 At your commands behold me, without strife,
 Well-pleased, and ready to repeat—the "Wife." }

THE END.

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